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WHEN EVENING CAME RUPERT FOUND HIMSELF BESIDE NORAH, BENEATH THE OLIVE TREES.

## NORAH'S GUARDIAN.

### [A NOVELETTE.]

#### PROLOGUE.

"A DOCTOR, a doctor, I want an English doctor, do you understand?" and Miss Dutton, a stout, well-dressed Englishwoman, whose usually florid, good-humoured face was now pale with fright and clouded with anxiety, looked imploringly at the padrone of the "Aquila," the little inn at Bordighese, where she and her niece were stopping.

"But Signora," returned the man, looking frightened himself, and spreading out his broad, fat hands deprecatingly, "there is no English doctor here; we have a good apothecary, Sor Antonio, but—"

"Ah! I have no faith in your apothecary," returned the lady, impatiently. "And the Signorina is very ill—the fever has—"

At the sound of the word "fever" the padrone became agitated; fever was a dreaded ailment

in Bordighese, he did not like to hear that a guest of his—one of the inmates of the Aquila, the healthiest, cleanest, best-conducted hotel on this side Venice, had fever.

"But Signora, Sor Antonio is a clever man."

"Yes, but I tell you I want an English doctor," reiterated the lady in a tearful yet commanding voice, as if she believed that the poor padrone could, if he would, produce a full-blown English M.D. for her satisfaction. "I hate all—"

At that instant the door of a neighbouring apartment that had been ajar during the conversation opened, and a tall, gentlemanly-looking man stepped out into the corridor where Miss Dutton and the padrone were standing.

"Pardon me, I am an Englishman, and have been—am a doctor. Can I be of any service to you?" he said, with a courteous bow.

Miss Dutton clapped her hands with a joyful exclamation.

"Oh, thank Heaven!" she cried. "Yes—if you will come and see my poor niece, sir, I should be extremely grateful. She met with an accident a few days ago, and scalded her arm badly in

saving a child who would, if it had not been for her, have probably been scalded to death. Will you come and see her now? She is very feverish and—"

"I will come at once," he replied; and Miss Dutton, without further parley, led the way to a door at the further end of the corridor, opened it, and ushered her newly-found friend into a large, airy, and comfortable apartment, the windows of which commanded a beautiful view of the surrounding country, with the blue ocean in the far distance.

On a bed in the corner lay a young girl, wrapped in a loose white dressing-gown; one arm bandaged and in a sling, her hair lying on the pillow in luxuriant masses of golden-brown tresses, her eyes hollow and bright, and her face deadly white, save for a crimson spot on either cheek.

The doctor started for a moment as his eyes fell on her, but instantly resumed his quiet, professional manner.

She was very beautiful, and very ill—or likely to become very ill; that he saw at a glance, and hastened at once to the bedside.

"A doctor, an English doctor, Norah, my

love," said Miss Dutton, answering the look of surprised inquiry in the girl's eyes. "I knew there must be such a person somewhere, but that dolt Menare professed he knew of no doctor but old Antonio, whilst all the while Doctor—"

"Hasted," said the Englishman, feeling Norah's pulse carefully. "You must excuse the padrone, though, Madam; I only arrived here yesterday, and he could not have known I was a doctor, unless indeed (and he smiled a grave but very pleasant smile) I carry my profession in my face."

Miss Dutton smiled, and perhaps for the first time, took a good look at the new-comer's face. No, she was obliged to allow to herself, he did not look like a doctor; if she had been asked his profession, she would have said he belonged to the service, was probably a cavalry officer.

"No, perhaps the poor man did not know; one must excuse him," she said. "How kind it was of you to make yourself known. The arm? yes, Antonio bandaged it, let me help you," and she hastened to assist Mr. Hasted in removing the bandage from her niece's arm.

The girl bore the operation bravely, though it was a painful one, and it disclosed a large scald on the lower part of her beautifully-rounded arm.

Mr. Hasted busied himself with it, dressed it, re-bandaged it, and was able to give both aunt and niece a reassuring opinion about it; and after prescribing a fever draught for his patient and sitting beside her for a short time, taking notes of her temperature, and informing himself as to the way in which she met with her accident, he rose, and with a reluctance that made him smile to himself afterwards, as he remembered it, left the room.

"A charming man!—how lucky he was here, darling," said Miss Dutton enthusiastically to her niece. "You will soon get better now, Norah; and isn't he good-looking?"

"Very good-looking," replied the girl with a little blush. "Yes, I shall soon get better now, aunt; in fact I feel easier already now that the bandage is not so tightly put on. Ah! here is the medicine; I will take it, and then try to sleep as he advised."

She did so, and half an-hour later Miss Dutton had the satisfaction of seeing her niece sink into a peaceful slumber.

Rupert Hasted sauntered out into the garden of the hotel, and seating himself on a marble bench under the shade of a group of olive trees, began to read; speedily, however, the book was thrown aside and he glanced towards the window of the room where his patient lay.

"Poor little girl!" he thought, pityingly, "a nasty accident; and she was injured in saving a little child from a like fate. A pretty creature—I never saw a sweeter face. Dutton! I wonder what Duttons they belong to, and where they are going to? I don't remember seeing them at Venice; probably they are on their road there—they and I are travelling in opposite directions. I did mean to have left this place to-morrow, but I must wait and see her through, I suppose; and when she is able to travel I can continue my homeward way."

And he sighed as he pronounced the word "homeward," a tired, sad look coming into his dark eyes.

He was a handsome man as Miss Dutton had remarked, but more distinguished-looking, perhaps, than positively handsome. He was tall, and carried himself erect, walking with an unmistakable military gait. His features were good, his eyes keen and expressive, his mouth firm and decided, and his age might have been six or eight and thirty.

"Cumberland will seem dull and cold after this," he thought, as he glanced across the lovely landscape before him. "I've been so accustomed to warm countries, south and east, that I miss the rich colouring of such lands in our own bleak island, not but that Thurlston is beautiful, too, in its own way, but cold—cold!"

And he shivered as if he could feel the biting winter winds that blew around Thurlston Court, his home, and came roaring and blustering down the valley, driving sleet and snow before them,

covering the grey hill side with a white mantle and the broad lake with a sheet of glassy ice.

"A sweet face, and a sweet voice," he went on, still thinking of the sick girl. "I'm glad I overheard the conversation between Menare and the old lady; she was right about Sig. Antonio I expect, and those Italian doctors don't understand English constitutions. I hope the fever won't run high, it's a pity I did not hear of the accident sooner. Let me see, I suppose I may be pretty sure that she won't be able to go on to Venice for a week at least."

And the idea seemed to give Rupert Hasted decided satisfaction.

Early next morning he knocked at the door of Miss Dutton's salon, and was admitted. She rose to meet him, joyfully.

"She is better—Norah is decidedly better," she cried, giving him her hand. "The fever left her early, and was far less severe; she has had several hours of good sleep. Will you come and see her? I think you will agree with me that she is improving."

Rupert followed Miss Dutton into the adjoining room and felt his heart beating more quickly than usual at the thought of seeing his patient; a look of rather bitter amusement came into his eyes at the discovery.

"Apparently I have forgotten my professional impenetrability," he thought, "anyhow, what can this pretty child ever be to me! Why should my battered old heart beat at the idea of meeting her? Surely the days are over long ago, when it should be a prey to the soft emotions!"

His eyes met Norah's at that moment, and a thrill passed through his heart; here sank a little beneath his gaze, and it was by an effort he recovered his composure and was able to speak in his usual, calm, unconcerned tone, making the necessary inquiries concerning his patient's condition and the manner in which the night had passed.

She was certainly much better, and he was able to advise her to leave her room and take a little fresh air in the garden as soon as the heat of the day should be over.

When evening came he found himself beside her, beneath the olive trees, and when she returned to the house it was his arm that supported her as she crossed the garden; then Miss Dutton insisted on his staying to take coffee with them, and it was late ere he bade the ladies good-night.

"A nice, kind old lady and a charming girl," he thought.

"Well! after we part here I don't suppose we shall ever meet again; they live abroad it seems. So I—I needn't mind."

So every day found Rupert Hasted in company with Miss Dutton and her niece, and their friendship, as friendship between compatriots who meet in foreign lands does, grew rapidly. When the week was over and Dr. Hasted was obliged to admit that Miss Norah's arm was nearly well and that the journey on to Venice could be undertaken with safety, it seemed as if they were quite old friends, and also, as Rupert was obliged to acknowledge to himself, that it would be a painful wrench to tear himself away from their society.

"I've been wrong," he thought to himself with a frowning brow. "I ought to have kept away from them—fled from temptation. Yes, temptation," and he sighed. "Well, she'll make some fellow very happy some day, lucky dog; but it will be long before she meets with anyone worthy of her. I shall tell them to-night that I think they can start on their journey as soon as it pleases them, and then, if they wish—inisist, I will see them safely to Venice, and start on my journey to England as soon as—"

At that moment the door opened, and a dark-eyed waiter brought him a telegram.

Dr. Hasted tore it open hurriedly.

"Return at once!" it said, "you are required at home, do not stay away longer."

The light faded out of his eyes, and an odd, hunted, weary look came into them.

"Ha! I understand. Yes, I must start at once, and, perhaps, it is better so. Not that she cares, of course. I have done her no harm, at any rate, by my dallying—it is only I who will suffer," he thought.

Was he right? Afterwards, when he thought of the sudden change in Norah's face, the

momentary expression of reproach and dismay in her eyes, when he told her and Miss Dutton he must leave them in a few hours, it made him uneasy, and he almost doubted it; but he comforted himself by thinking that she would very soon forget him; indeed, what should a young girl, a child almost as she was, see in a man of his age, that should make her waste a thought on him? He might remember her, perhaps, for a while, but she would surely forget him!

## CHAPTER I.

On the slope of one of the giant hills of Cumberland, at whose foot slumbered a deep, dark lake, stood Thurlston Court, Rupert Hasted's home. It was a huge, rambling, grey-stone, mansion, with tall chimneys, curious gables, and long narrow windows, that stood up grim and ghostly-looking against the grey hillside, with a few gigantic goarled oaks, and a group or two of tall firs about it, giving it, however, but little shade or shelter, and looking weird and wind-tossed as they swayed and swung their branches in the mountain blast.

A broad carriage drive led up to the house, through an almost timberless park, where here and there masses of bare, jagged rocks, rose up out of the short turf and heather, of fantastic shapes and enormous size.

Around the house lay a garden and pleasure grounds of some beauty; but even here the bleak winds and stony soil had rendered the task of the cultivator a difficult one, save in the sheltered nooks, the shrubs and plants looked pinched and starved, only the rough, hardy, species flourished spite of the gardener's care.

The view from the Court was, however, a magnificent one, if the scenery were a trifle rugged and wild. A splendid panorama of rocky mountains, wooded fells, and silvery lakes, lay spread out before the eyes of the spectator, over which the ever-changing lights and shades played continually, now transforming the grey hill-sides into a slope of glowing green, or the dull shadows in the deep valleys into shades of purple and crimson, touching the hill tops with golden splendour, and the dark lakes with silvery brightness, whilst the mists, slowly driven along the mountain sides by the breeze, would wreath themselves in fantastic clouds around the brows of the rocky hills, or fill up the valleys with a thick, impenetrable mass of mysterious whiteness. Lonesome, awe-inspiring, solemn almost as it was no one could look on the landscape without feeling its beauty.

The interior of Thurlston Court was a little grim and gruesome, it must be confessed, and there was an air of deserted loneliness in the long narrow passages and large low rooms, many of which had not been inhabited for a very long period; but there was a certain suite of apartments opening out of the great hall and facing to the south, which were of a far more cheerful aspect, and it was this part of the huge mansion that Rupert Hasted occupied when he paid his Cumberland home a visit.

Only five years previously Thurlston Court had become his property, an old and eccentric relative, who, in his youth, had squandered his wealth, and who, in his latter years, had lived the life of a recluse, in a vain endeavour to repair the havoc his extravagances had created in the family fortunes, had left it to him along with an income scarcely sufficient to keep up an ordinary establishment, to say nothing of a property like Thurlston Court; so, after a vain attempt to let the place, Rupert had, one dark autumn evening suddenly arrived there, together with two or three servants, and taken possession of his abode, and ever since had passed several months of each year beneath its roof.

The winter had begun, and Rupert Hasted came downstairs one morning to find the hills covered with snow, and the lake with ice; he looked out of the window of the breakfast-room with a shiver, and turned to the fire that blazed cheerfully on the hearth, by which the breakfast-table was set, and stretched out his hands towards the glowing coals.



"A bitter morning," he thought. "We shall be blocked in with snow for a week or two now, I suppose. Letters! let me see what the post has brought me to-day," and he sat down in a low chair and took up the bundle of letters that lay beside his plate and turned them over thoughtfully.

Two years had passed since he had received the telegram that hastened his return to England, and ended his acquaintance, so pleasantly begun, with Miss Dutton and her niece; two years that had altered him but little, and which had failed to make him forget his friends of the "Acquila," at Bordegheese. He was a little graver, perhaps, and a line of silver might be seen here and there in his dark hair, but that was all.

Suddenly the look on his face changed, as he turned over the letters, and took up one with a foreign postage stamp on it, directed in a formal handwriting.

"From Rangoon," he said to himself in surprise, "who remembers me there yet, I wonder; it is years since I was there with the—th, unless it be that strange fellow, Desborough, who—but no, it can't be, let us see."

And he opened the letter. It was written in a formal business hand, but an enclosure fell out of it, carefully sealed, and directed in a bold handwriting that Hasted recognized at once.

"By Jove! it is from Desborough, that's his writing and his coat of arms. Browne and Moltry—what do they say? Dead! poor chap, an odd, eccentric fellow, but with a noble heart for all that—let me see what they have to tell me about him."

"Dear Sir, (the letter ran)—Our client, Oliver Desborough, Esq., of Rangoon, entrusted us with the enclosed letter with orders to forward it to you, after his death. We received it from him just a week ago, when he was lying dangerously ill, and we regret to inform you that his death took place yesterday (the 24th inst) and we now, in accordance with his instructions, forward you the enclosed.

"You will doubtless receive a communication from the representatives of our firm in London, who have, we are aware, important business, connected with the disposal of Mr. Desborough's large property, to transact,

"We remain, &c., &c.,

"BROWNE & MOLTRY."

"Poor Desborough! large property had he! I believed him to be a poor man, but what can his lawyers want with me? Dead! I'm sorry, but it's what will come to each one of us sooner or later, and surely the world is not so delightful a place that one should pity a fellow over much for having to leave it. What does he say? I wonder at his remembering me all these years—it's a long time since he wrote, though in bygone years we were great friends."

He opened the dead man's letter slowly, and with a sad, far away look in his eyes, and read as follows,—

"DEAR HASTED,—

"I dare say you imagine I have forgotten you, because I have not written to you for so long a time; but I have done no such thing.

"Once a friend, always a friend with me, and my friendship for you has never changed, as you will believe when you read this, and see that it is to you I turn for help in a matter—the only matter that troubles me now that I am dying.

"You knew, I believe, that I was a widower, didn't you? If not you know it now (my wife died ten months after our marriage and my heart broke), but what neither you, nor more than one or two people in the world knew is, that I have a daughter, a child whose birth caused her mother's death and my life-long misery, and who since that day I have never seen, and who, till now, I have never loved.

"Now I am dying I feel I have been wrong, very wrong to hate my child for being the innocent cause of my misery, and whilst I have life in me I write to implore you to aid me in repairing the injustice I have done her.

"I wish my child had been a son, instead of a daughter—a poor, weak, innocent girl—able to

look out for himself, and fight the battle of life alone and bravely, instead of requiring guidance and protection as she will, but wishing is vain, and the best I can do for my child is to leave her in the hands of a guardian who will see that she comes to no harm, that fortune-hunters don't ruin her (for she will be rich eventually—very rich), and that she has that protection which I, had I lived, ought to have extended to her.

"Will you accept the position of guardian to her, my dear friend? It is my greatest desire—my dying wish, you should do so.

"At present she is living with my lawyer's mother in London—a temporary arrangement, of course—her mother's cousin who has taken charge of her all her life (her only relative), having died.

"Will you go to her aid? She is not happy in her present home, and do what you can for her, keep her with you always if you can.

"Of the arrangement I have made for her regarding money matters, Browne & Co., my solicitors in London, will inform you.

"My trustee, Mr. Wilton Ellerslie has the management of all my money affairs, and knows what I desire to be done with the large fortune I leave.

"My directions concerning it, however, I wish to be kept secret and unknown to everyone, till my daughter is of age—she is now nineteen. When she is twenty years and six months of age, however, he will have a communication to make to you concerning my wishes regarding my money and my child's future.

"I sincerely trust that you will accede to my request. And now farewell, my strength is exhausted. I can write no more."

"Poor fellow! Me! Fancy asking me to be his daughter's guardian," he muttered. "Fancy old Desborough having a daughter and concealing the fact so carefully and successfully from every one! He never mentioned his wife to me, his best friend, though, of course, I knew from common report that he had been married. One may live with a man day after day, and never learn his secrets (and Rupert smiled sadly) if he's a mind to keep them to himself. By Jove! what am I to do—a young lady here, at Thurlston! Why, she'd die of ennui in a week! What on earth made poor Oliver think I was a fit person to be a girl's guardian, and make her happy—I, who all the time he knew me, scarcely spoke to a woman, and never went into ladies' society! Well, he was an extraordinary man, a very eccentric nature. Is there any letter from his London solicitors, I wonder; and what may the amount of the young lady's fortune be! Gad! I shall have all the young men in the county dancing attendance on her, I suppose, especially if she's pretty!"

He looked at the remaining letters cautiously.

"Ah! here it is," he said, "and (as he opened it) one from the young lady herself, I believe. Hum! over a hundred thousand pounds—five hundred a year to be paid her annually—she'll find that difficult to spend at Thurlston—the whole to be hers when she comes of age, under certain conditions, which are not to be made known to her nor to me (what can they matter to me!) till she is twenty-one. Let us see what the young lady herself says. A good handwriting; if I were a graphologist I should say Miss Desborough had great firmness of character, delicacy of perception, wit, and a large amount of tact."

He read the letter through carefully, and laid it down thoughtfully. It was straightforward and to the point. Miss Desborough had heard of her father's death, and of his wish that his old friend, Mr. Hasted, late of the—th Regiment, should become her guardian, and wrote to say how much she hoped he would consent to undertake the task.

"I don't think you will find me a very troublesome charge," she concluded. "I am by no means fond of gaiety. I love the country and solitude, and am quite accustomed to elderly people and their ways. I am a good nurse, too, and took care of my dear aunt through her illness and till the day of her death."

"Accustomed to elderly people! Why does

she say that?" thought Rupert. "Well, of course, to a girl of nineteen, I am an 'elderly' man, I suppose, thirty-six seems a great age to her no doubt. I like her letter though. I've till afternoon to consider my reply. Come in—who's there?"

There had been a knock at the door. It opened, and an oldish woman in the dress of a servant, and of foreign appearance, entered.

"Am I wanted?" he asked, anxiously.

She nodded.

Hasted rose at once, left his untasted breakfast, and followed her.

An hour later he returned, looking grave and depressed, and recommenced the perusal of his letters.

"Poor Oliver—poor girl!" he muttered. "Well, I suppose I must do it! And yet there are difficulties in the way. Serious difficulties, poor Desborough! Had he known me as well as he imagined he might not have asked me to undertake this task. Did he think he was the only man in the world with a secret? If he did, he was mistaken."

And Rupert leant his head on his hand with a weary sigh.

"I suppose I can't well refuse," he went on to himself, "it is the request of a dying man—a friend; but if I accept, my mode of life will have to undergo a great deal of change. Thurlston is no fit abode for a young girl; under any circumstances it would be a dull home. She would feel herself buried alive even—even if there were no other drawbacks to existence here. No, Miss Desborough must not come to Thurlston! I must engage a good, trustworthy duenna for her, take a house for them in some cheerful place—in Kensington—or if they prefer the sea or country to town, in Brighton, or some pleasant rural neighbourhood. I shall then be at liberty to come here when I am wanted (and his face grew graver than ever), perhaps it may not be for so very long that I may be required, and surely I should not grudge the trouble—such as it is—of coming here when it is absolutely necessary I should do so. Poor Desborough! I little guessed what he was suffering in those old days at Rangoon; we knew less of each other than we imagined!"

For a long time Hasted brooded and deliberated before answering the letters he had that morning received, but by afternoon he had decided. He wrote a letter accepting the post of guardian to his old friend's daughter, and promising to be in London in the course of a few days.

## CHAPTER II.

THE weather, however, prevented Rupert Hasted from setting out for London as soon as he had intended.

The snow fell pitilessly, and for several days the roads between Thurlston and the railway were blocked up. Then, when the thaw set in, other matters tended to hinder his departure.

The elderly servant—the housekeeper as she was usually called—was constantly requiring her master's presence in the distant wing of the house in which were the rooms she occupied, and Rupert would return from his confabulations with her, looking gloomy and disquieted—gloom, in fact, pervaded the whole establishment.

The servants huddled together of an evening over the fire in the servants' hall would talk and whisper with bated breath of sounds, voices, mysterious footsteps heard in the grim old house.

One girl averred that she had seen a ghostly figure on the upper landing of the grand staircase toward the witching hour one night; that it had nodded and beckoned her follow it. To be sure Mrs. Agar, the housekeeper, had appeared almost at the same moment, and finding her half fainting, had scolded for not being in bed at such an hour, and bundled her off to her own room then and there, ridiculing the idea of her mistaking her for a ghost. Ghosts, indeed!

Mrs. Agar was indignant at the bare idea of there being such things as ghosts, at any rate at Thurlston Court, but Bella knew better. The village people had strange tales about the old

place, and Jesse Ford, the gardener's help, declared that he had seen lights—corpse lights—in the northern wing of the house on two occasions of late, a part of the mansion where, as everyone knew, nobody lived or slept!

And as the three women crept up to their bedrooms after these talks they clung to each other, and shivered and shook with fright at every sound, almost shrinking with terror as, on one occasion, a door at the end of the passage opened suddenly, and Mrs. Agar, followed by the master issued from it.

"Something wrong with the roof, it's leaking with the thaw," she said, as if to explain their presence there together at that hour and in such a part of the house.

But of course the explanation did not satisfy the frightened maids, who felt sure that Mrs. Agar had heard or seen something awesome (she did look scared), and had called her master to her aid.

So three weeks slipped away and yet Rupert Hasted had not set out on his way, and then the snow began to fall again!

"Hang it! Let the weather be what it may, I must start to-morrow," he thought, as he threw aside the curtain and looked out across the park growing rapidly white again. "Hark! listen—what is the sound I hear. Carriage wheels! who can it be, I wonder!"

And he peered anxiously out through the fast-falling snow.

The sound came nearer and nearer, and presently a carriage with luggage on it came into sight; a moment or two later it drew up at the door, the bell was rung, and a servant hastened to open the door, Rupert entering the hall just as two figures had descended from the carriage, and whilst, to his astonishment, a bright girlish laugh resounded through the hall.

"Here we are at last, and safe enough, you see, Grantham," said a merry voice. "Mr. Hasted is here—he expected us to night, did he not?"

And the speaker turned to the servant.

Rupert stepped forward quickly, the lady who had spoken turned round suddenly at the sound of his footsteps, and he found himself face to face with one whom, though he had never forgotten, he had little expected ever to meet again—his patient of the "Aquila," at Bordighese.

"Miss Norah!" he exclaimed, unable to prevent his voice from betraying his joy.

"Dr. Hasted—you here—oh!" and she started, drew back and blushed, her face full of perplexity, "where is my guardian then—I—"

"What—are you Miss Desborough, then?" he returned. "I thought you were Miss—"

"Yes, I am Norah Desborough—didn't you know? You called me Miss Dutton, poor auntie's name, once or twice I remember," she replied, "I didn't know Mr. Hasted had a son. I didn't dream you were related to him, and—"

"But I am Mr. Hasted," he answered, "your guardian, as it seems. Dr. Hasted if you please to call me so. Yes, I was assistant surgeon to the —th regiment when I knew your father, Miss Norah, and that is why I felt entitled to describe myself as a doctor to your aunt when we first met."

"My guardian, you are my guardian! really, truly!" cried Norah, clapping her hands, joyfully. "Oh, that is delightful, Grace," turning to the eminently respectable domestic who stood behind her. "This is Mr. Hasted, my guardian—only think, you remember him!"

"Yes, Miss Norah," she answered, with a courtesy to Rupert, "then perhaps, miss, Mr. Hasted would kindly tell one of the maids to point out your rooms to me, and I'll see your luggage taken up, and unpack your things—"

"Yes, yes, of course. You must have expected us an hour ago, Mr. Hasted," said Norah, "but the snow—"

"Indeed, I was not expecting you at all. Your coming is a surprise—a delightful surprise," said Rupert, with a smile.

"You did not get my telegram!" cried Norah, in dismay.

"No, my dear Miss Norah. I did not," he laughed, "but never mind. Come in—come in. Jane, call Mrs. Agar! Rooms shall be ready for you as soon as possible, in the meantime come

into the dining-room where there is a fire, I don't feel as if I quite understand all this yet."

"You—you are not vexed—put out by our sudden arrival, are you?" asked Norah, as soon as she found herself alone with her guardian. "Oh, this is indeed wonderful! I never suspected it," and she burst into a merry laugh. "Fancy! I expected to find my guardian a sober, grey-haired, perhaps gouty old gentleman, and—and I find him—I find you instead! And we both believed we were strangers to each other, and behold! we turn out to be old friends."

She threw off her hat and cloak as she spoke and turned towards Rupert, looking into his face with frank, fearless eyes.

How beautiful she was! He felt his heart beat quickly as he gazed at her. If she had been pretty and charming when a girl of scarce seventeen, at nineteen she was a thousand times more lovely.

The beautiful face had lost none of its delicacy or sweetness, but the look of fragility and ill-health had passed away from it, her figure had rounded and developed, her cheeks glowed with health, and her eyes were bright, full of life and fire.

"It was provoking you did not receive my telegram; I can't understand how it was," she went on. "I know it is always a bore to be taken unawares, as we have taken you, though you are so kind about it. I really could not stay any longer at Mr. Browne's" (and she blushed). "I hope you won't think me foolish and fanciful, but young Reginald Browne—Ah! I'll tell you about it all afterwards. Here is Grantham, come to tell me my room is ready."

The old servant, followed by Jane, appeared at the door as Norah spoke; and taking up her hat she followed her to the apartment that had been hastily got ready for her.

She was enthusiastic in praises of the quaint old-fashioned beauty of The Manor, when, half-an-hour later, she returned to the dining-room, where dinner was ready and her guardian waiting for her.

Such a strange, beautiful old place! Such oak panelling! Such nooks, nooks and corners, broad staircases and spacious corridors, she had never seen! She loved old places, and her rooms were delightful.

"We must always live here!" she cried. "You wrote about taking a house for me in London or Brighton, but why? I shall be more than contented to stay in this place; the country around must be splendid, the mountains I could see are beautiful, and in summer—"

"In summer, I grant you, the place is well enough," interrupted Rupert, with a shade of embarrassment in his tone, "but in winter it is terribly dreary. One can hardly get out when the snow is on the ground—"

"But skating! surely you have skating! and I love it!" she cried gaily.

"Oh, yes; excellent skating," he answered; "but we are three miles from the nearest town, and Thurleston is but a hamlet—a handful of cottages, in fact; there are no neighbours within several miles of us. It is dull—dreadfully dull—"

"Oh, don't fear! I shall not find it dull," she replied. "Tell me, now, if it had not been for me you would have remained all the winter here, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, most likely," he replied with a little hesitation; "but for me it is—"

"Then to begin with (we have a lot of things to talk over and settle, haven't we?); but, to begin with, I am going to make you promise you will make no change in your way of life, your plans, and arrangements for me. You love this place and like to live here"—(Rupert turned aside to hide a sudden expression of dissent that came into his face)—"and I don't want, I won't allow you to quit it on my account. I am really honestly fond of the country, and am not, especially now, at all anxious for gaiety." And she glanced at her black dress. "I have a hundred occupations that will keep me from feeling dull; and—and—to say nothing of your society."

And she smiled coquettishly.

Rupert smiled too, and then sighed.

"You are very good to think so much of my convenience," he began.

"No, indeed," she interrupted, leaning forward and fixing her fearless eyes on his. "It is you who are good to undertake the care of me, and I mean that you shall not be put to more trouble than I can help. We stay here, then?"

"We must for the present, at any rate," he replied, evasively, with a little laugh. "Listen to the snow"—as the wind dashed a shower of flakes against the window—"the roads and lanes will be full of drifts to-morrow."

"Yes, how nice it feels to be sitting beside a blazing fire like this, feeling so secure and comfortable and quiet, whilst the storm is raging without. Oh! what was that?"

And she started from her chair, a low, wailing cry that came, she could not tell from where, had fallen on her ear. She looked at Rupert Hasted in terror; he too had started to his feet.

"It is nothing," he said, "one—one of the dogs; they have left him out in the cold. Excuse me one moment."

He left the room without waiting for her reply. She heard the sounds of his footsteps rapidly crossing the hall, and the closing of a distant door, and then all was still.

Norah sank back in her chair.

"How foolish to be so startled by the howling of a dog—it was a blood curdling cry though, poor creature. No wonder it cried if it is shut out such a night as this. Just fancy! Dr. Hasted being my guardian! I remember him so well, have so often thought of him since we met at Berdegheze, he is not a bit changed. Aunt liked him so much, I am sure she would be glad if she knew I was under his charge."

A door, one she had not before noticed, opened at the further end of the room, and Rupert came in.

"I have made it all right," he said, speaking lightly. "You won't be disturbed by Rover again, Miss Norah. Now tell me why you were so anxious to leave Mrs. Browne's!"

She blushed and laughed.

"Because—well! I had no wish to become Mrs. Reginald Browne—that is the reason, to be frank with you. The young man would not take 'No,' for an answer, and his poor old mother evidently thought me a brute for hurting her dear boy's feelings; so—I said I wished to see you as soon as might be, and—and—I telegraphed, and set off this morning before either mother or son were stirring. You see, I've been accustomed to take my own way up to the present, guardian."

"So it seems," laughed Rupert.

## CHAPTER III.

In spite of Norah's liking and admiration for Thurleston Court increasing, as time went on, its master showed a great disinclination to settle down or to allow her to settle down there for the spring and summer as she faint would have done. It was not the place for a young girl. People would imagine he was trying to shut her away from the rest of the world, he said, laughingly. Even he, himself, could not stand the loneliness of the place for long. After a while it affected his spirits, as it did everyone's else—he had intended—wished, to go abroad in the spring, and if Norah had no real objection he would like to carry out his intentions!

"If you really wish it, of course," she said, trying to hide her disappointment, for she had been very happy and contented at the Court, and had felt sure that Thurleston with her guardian's society would be all she could wish for in the future, and was hurt at his seeming to hint that the *solitude à deux* she found so satisfying, might in time prove dull—to him at least.

"And whom would you like for a companion on our travels?" he went on, kindly, "anyone you choose would be—"

"Companion! Why, surely I have you, and Grantham, of course, will come with me," she answered, in surprise.

"But wouldn't you like to take a friend, a young lady of your own age with us?" he began.



"No, I certainly should not," she answered, with a quick look at her guardian. "Such an arrangement would quite spoil—but, of course," she continued, coldly, "if there is anyone you wish should join us—"

"I! I was only thinking of you," he replied, quietly. "I sometimes fear you must find my company a little dull, that you want the companionship of some one of your own age, and—"

"Please put that idea out of your head, once and for all, then," retorted Norah, laughing. "Why, we get on together so well, doctor," (for so she often called him, in memory of old days, as she would say). "As to age—well I can never realise there is really much difference between us. Very disrespectful of me, isn't it? But I am old for my years, as poor auntie used to say, and you, I think, are young for yours; besides, the difference is not so very great."

"Only nineteen years. I am just double your age," he answered.

"I know, but I never feel it is so," she returned, thoughtfully, "and what does it matter, that is, if you don't find me too hopelessly young and foolish to be a companion to you?"

And she looked up anxiously into his face.

"Ah! you know I don't," he replied impulsively, "you are more than all I could wish for as a companion—you are like a dear daughter to me, Norah," he added with a sudden change in his manner; the eagerness dying out of it and being replaced by his usual calmness.

So it was decided that in March they should leave England and pass the spring in the south of France; and things went on in their usual way till the time came for beginning the preparations for their departure.

It was the morning of the day previous to that fixed on for them to set out, and Rupert Hasted was seated in the breakfast room waiting for Norah to make her appearance. She was late, an unusual thing for her, and when she did come down she looked pale and disturbed.

"I have had a bad night," she said in reply to Rupert's inquiries.

"A bad night, what prevented you from sleeping; you are not ill, I trust?" he asked anxiously.

"Oh no! not ill," she replied; "but, don't laugh at me, it was a dream I had, then, at least I suppose it was a dream, for Gran, who sleeps in my room, saw nothing, though—"

"Saw! what did you see or fancy you saw?" asked Rupert with a sudden look of anxiety—almost apprehension in his face.

"Well! I'll tell you if you like, doctor," she answered hesitatingly, "but you must promise not to laugh at me too much. I was lying awake—or I believe I was awake—when I saw my door (I never lock my door at night, though Gran would, if I'd let her) slowly opened and a face peeped round it. Oh! such a face! (and she shuddered) dark, with bright glistening eyes and black hair, and oh! such an evil malicious expression! In an instant it was gone, and the next moment I was out of bed and had rushed to the door and (I am ashamed to say) shut and bolted it. Gran vows she was awake too, and saw nothing which she certainly would have if there had been anything to see as her bed is exactly opposite the door. Perhaps it was only a dream, yet it seemed very real, and the face has haunted me ever since; but, doctor, how serious you look—frightened almost. I am not going mad I assure you, though you may be, you think so. I am quite willing to allow it may have been a dream."

"I am glad we are leaving the Court to-morrow, very glad," said Rupert, drawing a long breath. "The gloom and solitude of the place are beginning to affect your spirits, Norah."

"Oh! nonsense!" she laughed, "my spirits are excellent. It was fancy, no doubt."

"But I don't like to hear of your having such fancies. Lock your door to-night in case—if—"

"If a ghost should really be about?" she laughed; "but locks and bolts won't keep out spirits you know, doctor. However, I shall have to lock it, for Grantham's sake; she, I am sure, wouldn't sleep a wink if I did not. She's heard all sorts of foolish stories about the Thurlston ghost from the maids here, and vows I must have

seen it, predicts all sorts of misfortunes in consequence."

"Heaven protect you from them, and all other evils, my dear," said Rupert, with feeling, and for a moment he laid his hand on hers; then he rose suddenly, and hastened out of the room, leaving Norah not a little surprised that he should have been so much affected by the recital of her nocturnal experience!

There had been something in the tone in which he had spoken his last words that had stirred a cord in Norah's heart, and filled it with a strange delight for a long time after he left her, she sat sunk in a sweet reverie.

What did it matter where she was, at Thurlston or abroad, so long as she was with him—he so good, so brave, so noble. How happy she was to have such a friend and protector! How she honoured and esteemed, and—yes, how she loved him!

A blush rose to her cheek and a soft light filled her eyes as she sat before the fire in a low chair, her eyes fixed dreamily on the smouldering logs, meditating—dreaming the first part of that sweet dream all dream once in their lifetime.

And as spring and summer passed on, and Norah and her guardian roamed through the Sunny South together, she learnt more fully the secret of her heart—learnt that there was but one man in the whole wide world she could ever love, and that that guardian was that one! The discovery frightened her almost. Was it likely that he, so far her superior in everything, he who stood and considered himself in the place of a father to her, was it likely he would ever love her save as he had once said he loved and regarded her—as a daughter?

What were the nineteen years of difference in their ages of which he thought so much? Nothing, as it seemed to her. Where was the younger man who could be compared to him? Even more—how inferior they were to him in looks—in mind, talents, manners and true goodness of heart. Oh! if some day she could gain his love she would be happy indeed.

And if not? Well! at any rate she was his ward, they could continue their present mode of life even after she came of age. They could always be to each other the best and dearest of friends, and that was happiness great happiness, even if the greatest could never be hers.

The year passed away very quickly, and Norah's twentieth birthday was at hand. Six months later Mr. Desborough's executors would have to make the communication to him, his old friend had mentioned in his last letter, and by which, as it seemed, his daughter's future would be greatly affected.

Rupert Hasted found himself often speculating as to the purport of the message he was to receive, and began to be not a little anxious about it.

Very soon his young charge would be of age, and able, if so it pleased her, to take the management of her affairs into her own hands, to quit his roof if she wished; and Rupert's heart sank when he thought how in all probability before many months were over she might be with him no longer. Suitors were numerous, she might ere long be a wife, and he trembled at the idea of what his life would be like without her—at the solitude and gloom of Thurlston—of the loneliness of his days either there or elsewhere without her to gladden them.

He loved her, yes, he loved her with all the strength of his strong nature, all the depth and warmth of his tender heart.

Yet he knew it was necessary he should stifle that love, trample it down, stamp the life out of it, or, if he could not destroy it, at least hide it away from all men, deep down in the lowest depths of his secret soul—neither Norah nor any other woman could be his wife.

He took himself grievously to task for having meekly allowed this love to grow up and gain such an ascendancy over him, and trembled, when at times he saw Norah's eyes fixed on him with a sweet, confiding look, and noted how anxious she was to please him in every way; how devoted she was to him, how eager for his praise and approval, how sensitive to the slightest blame from him, the slightest coldness or neglect, least she might be

learning to love him too well, and laying up for herself bitter grief and suffering in the future. Oh! he could bear the grief and suffering himself if she were saved from it; but to see her suffer, to be near her and unable to soothe her, be debarred from telling her, even of his love—that would, indeed, be hard to endure.

#### CHAPTER IV.

Six months later found Hasted and his ward in London, their departure from the south having been hastened, not only by the importunities of several aspirants for the English heiress's hand but by Mr. Reginald Browne's appearance and the renewal of his attentions to Norah, spite of her coldness and the decided manner in which she repulsed them, and one cold frosty morning, after they had passed nearly three weeks in town, Mr. Ellerslie, the trustee of Oliver Desborough's property, was announced.

Rupert, though he had been expecting him, changed colour as he heard his name pronounced, and a feeling of coming evil took possession of him. Mr. Ellerslie, a small, pleasant faced, grey-haired man, came into the room bowing and smiling, and held out his hand to Rupert, as if they had been old friends.

"You, doubtless, know what I have come about," he began, after a minute or two's talk.

"Partly," interrupted Rupert, with so much abruptness in his tone, that the kind little man looked startled, "you have a communication to make to me regarding—"

"On the part of our late friend Oliver Desborough," he said, "Yes—just so! I have a letter to give you, which he directed should be delivered to you as soon as his daughter should be twenty years and six months of age. I—I trust its contents will not be displeasing to you!" And he smiled and rubbed his hands, nodding in a friendly way at Rupert, over his spectacles. "Miss Desborough," he went on, "is a very lovely, and a very charming young lady, and—"

"Miss Desborough is all you say and more," interrupted Rupert in a cold voice, holding out his hand nervously for the letter, "her presence under my roof during the past fifteen months, has been a great delight to me—"

"Of course—of course, and I make no doubt it will be so in the future—that you will wish to keep her with you always," (and his little blue eyes twinkled knowingly) "in which case, our poor friend's wishes, will doubtless, be carried out, and—and the—very unpleasant—eccentric alternative—but, there is the letter, and when I have given this one to Miss Desborough, my mission here will be accomplished. Can I see your ward, Mr. Hasted?"

"Certainly," replied Rupert; "will you follow me, Mr. Ellerslie? she is in the drawing-room."

"Your father's friend, Mr. Ellerslie, Norah, my dear," he said quietly; "have you forgotten that to-day—"

"Oh! indeed, I had quite forgotten it, I am ashamed to say," replied Norah, rising and giving her hand to Mr. Ellerslie. "Are you—must you go, doctor?"

"I will leave you with Mr. Ellerslie, my dear," he replied. "I shall be in the study if you will bring him to me when your interview is over, you will like to talk over matters alone, I dare say."

When he regained the study, Rupert opened the letter Mr. Ellerslie had given him with trembling hands.

"When you receive this, my dear Hasted" (it began), "Norah will have been your ward for over a year: in six months she will be of age; and it is regarding her future I wish to write to you. The fortune I leave is large. I do not believe in the capacity of a woman, especially a young woman, to manage a large fortune. Sooner or later she will fall prey to some calculating scoundrel—some needy fortune-hunter, she will marry him—my money, that I have laid by with so much care and toil will be squandered, and my child rendered miserable."

"I can only see one way to prevent this, and to that way I hope you will consent. You are

the only man in the world I trust implicitly. Hasted. By the time you receive this you will have learnt to know my daughter well, I trust you may also have learnt to love her. She is attractive, clever, and good, I hear, and if you will make her your wife she and my fortune will be safe, all will be hers, and therefore yours, and she will be saved from the unprincipled rogues I dread, who would rob her and then render her life miserable. Therefore, marry her, Hasted, if you can, and I make bold to say you will never regret it. She is like her mother, they tell me, and a woman more like an angel than my *lata* was, never breathed."

The letter fell from Rupert's hands. He turned pale as death, and a groan of anguish escaped him.

"Oh, Heaven! I knew it," he muttered. "If possible marry her! Oh! if it were only possible! But what more does he say!"

"If you have any doubts as to your own or my child's willingness to agree to such an arrangement, take six months to consider the matter. She will then be twenty-one, and my trustee will carry out the directions I have given him and make them known to her. Till then she will remain in ignorance of them, but I will let you know now what they are.—If my daughter refuses to marry you, or you find it impossible to ask her to become your wife, then, after her attaining her majority, eight hundred pounds a year will be paid her by the trustee, but the great bulk of my money will go to found hospitals and colleges in Burma, and various parts of the East."

"Also should my daughter marry without the consent or approval of you, her guardian, before she attains the age of twenty-five years, three hundred a year will be all she will bring her husband. I think by these arrangements I have safeguarded my child as far as I can from designing, unworthy people."

"My great hope, however, is that you will render all such precautions needless by giving her your name and protection through life. Any way, as long as you can keep her with you, do so, and even if she refuses your offer do not, if you can help it, let her quit the safe asylum of your roof; keep her under your own eye, and protect her, as far as possible, from the evils I dread for her."

Rupert laid down the letter with a dazed air, and for an instant or two anger against the dead man filled his heart.

"It's shameful—infernal!" he thought. "Why should I be the one on whom her future is made to depend? What right had Desborough to lay such a burden on me? Good Heaven! if he had only known!"

And Rupert Hasted started up and began striding up and down the room, much agitated.

What would he not have given to have been able to ask Norah to become his wife! but he knew it was impossible. Oh! the folly of his youth!—worse—bringing more sorrow in its train than many a crime might have done, how its consequences had dogged him on his way through life: what misery, and shame, and unhappiness had not that early indiscretion brought on him!

And now it seemed that the hardest blow of all was to fall.

Not only were the effects of his folly to cause him bitter grief, but they were to inflict a cruel injury on the girl he loved so dearly though so hopelessly.

What should he say—what reason would he have to assign for the course he would be obliged to take?

Not a soul living would know what motive really actuated him and rendered it impossible for him to comply with Oliver Desborough's wish. Would he be forced to lay bare his past? No, he could not do that; there were reasons that rendered that course as impossible as the other; the real reason must remain hidden, he could not divulge it!

These and the like thoughts almost maddened him, when a knock on the door aroused him and a servant appeared followed by Mr. Ellerslie. "Well, Mr. Hasted," he began in a jovial tone, "you have read—" but catching sight of Rupert's troubled face, he stopped short.

"I have read our poor friend's letter. Yes, Mr. Ellerslie," he said, "and—and I must say, I am greatly disturbed at the contents."

"Disturbed! really! I—I am surprised—sorry," began the good-natured old man.

"I don't think," interrupted Rupert, hotly, "that poor Desborough should have considered my marrying or not marrying his child, a sufficient reason for leaving or not leaving her his money. In the choice of a husband or wife, a person should be left unfettered."

"I feel sure Desborough has not said a word of money matters to his daughter," interrupted Mr. Ellerslie, "if she accepts you, she will not be actuated by any ulterior motive."

"I am sure Miss Desborough would be actuated by but one motive in choosing a husband," interposed Rupert, "but—but—"

"You doubt if she would choose you!" laughed the other. "Natural perhaps in a way, on your part, but between you and I, I don't doubt it. However, perhaps, you'll have settled that doubt before six months are over, Mr. Hasted, ha! ha!"

"Yes, in six months it will be settled certainly," said Rupert, in a low voice.

"Well! You have till then to consider, and no doubt in the end all those eccentric directions about hospitals and colleges for niggers, won't have to be carried out," he laughed, rising to go. Rupert shook his head.

"It is quite—most probable they will be," he said, gloomily.

"Ah! faint heart!" returned Mr. Ellerslie. "You'll have a different tale to tell me when I see you again. When do you leave town, Mr. Hasted?"

"The end of next week," returned Rupert. "My ward is anxious to get back to Thurston."

"Ah! she loves Cumberland she tells me. Good-bye, Mr. Hasted. I am leaving for Devonshire to-night or I should have hoped to see more of you and Miss Desborough."

And shaking hands in a very friendly manner the two men parted.

Scarcely had he gone, when Norah entered the room. There was a soft happy light in her eyes, and Rupert fancied she looked at him questioningly, but as she observed his pallor and agitation, a look of concern came into her face.

"You have read my poor father's letter!" she said, anxiously.

"Yes, my dear," replied Rupert with his most paternal manner. "He—he wishes me to keep you with me, till you are married—in fact under any circumstances, Norah."

"Of course—he—he says as much to me," she returned, but her face fell, his tone jarred on her.

"He says other things too, but into them I need not enter. Mr. Ellerslie will inform you of them when it is necessary," he went on speaking awkwardly, with a kind of restraint in his manner. "Are you prepared for our start next week, Norah?"

"Yes, quite," she said, surprised and a little annoyed at his changing the subject of conversation so abruptly, and struck with the embarrassment in his manner. "Are you busy, doctor? Am I disturbing you?"

"No, yes, well! I have letters to write just now," he replied, evasively.

"Then I'll go," she said.

And with the tears starting to her eyes she left him.

Soon after she gained her own room she read her father's letter through once more.

"My greatest desire is, that you should one day become Rupert Hasted's wife. If he asks you (and he may) think well before you refuse him, and know that if you accept him you will do so with my full approval, and will be carrying out my fondest wish."

"Refuse him! Ah! is that likely!" she murmured, "but he will never ask me. Once or twice, I have fancied he cared for me, but only for a moment, and that was some time ago. Lately he has grown distant—a change has come over him. No! he regards me as his daughter—or sister—that is all—and I, well I shall never marry!"

And throwing herself into a chair, she burst into tears.

## CHAPTER V.

A DAY or two later Rupert came into the room where Norah and her faithful companion, Mrs. Grantham, were seated at work, looking hurried and disturbed.

"I must leave you to-day—at once, Norah," he said abruptly, "business of importance calls me away. You will not mind travelling to Cumberland alone with Mrs. Grantham next week, will you?"

"No, of course not," replied Norah in surprise. "Dear doctor, I am sorry for this, you seem so much put out—"

"A little annoyed—but it is nothing, my dear," he answered, though from the tone of his voice Norah judged the trouble was more serious than he would allow, and she bade him adieu with a sad heart.

Thurston looked grey and grim standing out darkly against the hill-side in the moonlight, as Norah and Mrs. Grantham reached it a few days later.

The tops of the hills were covered with snow, and drifts still lay in the valley, and the gaunt trees around the house waved their gnarled branches hither and thither weirdly, in the icy wind.

Norah shivered as she lay back wrapped in furs in her corner of the brougham.

"It is a solemn, gloomy-looking old place," she mused, "but yet there is a wild grandeur in the scenery about it that I love. Ah! lights—lights in the western wing—but no, they are gone. Ah," as they turned the corner of the house, "how warmly they glow from the windows here! How different the place looks from this point of view!"

The door of the entrance hall was thrown open at this moment letting out a warm flood of light, and Rupert appeared at it.

"Glad to welcome you once more to Thurston, Norah," he said, heartily; "have you had a good journey? You must have found it very cold, I fear?"

"Not very," replied Norah, whose heart was beating fast with joy at seeing him again. "And oh, I am so glad to be here again."

"Are you?" he said, pleasantly. "Come into the dining-room."

As he spoke a carriage drove rapidly past the front of the house.

Norah glanced at her guardian in surprise.

"The doctor from Crookfell," he said. "We have had illness in the house."

And he walked away closing the hall door.

Norah followed him; and when she found herself in the well-lighted dining-room, she could not but perceive the change that the last ten days had wrought in her guardian's looks.

His eyes were hollow and sunken; he looked pale and weary, like a man who had passed sleepless nights, and who had some great anxiety weighing on his mind.

What could it be? If he would only tell her, only let her share his trouble!

But he was impassable, and she knew that even to let him see she noticed it would annoy him, so she wisely said nothing.

"You found everything all right when you got here, doctor, I suppose," she observed a little later in the evening. "It is nice to have a person you can trust to leave everything to when you go away, and Mrs. Agar—"

"Mrs. Agar is a very trustworthy person," interrupted Rupert, "but Mrs. Agar is my housekeeper no longer—"

"What! Mrs. Agar has left you—is gone!" cried Norah. "Is that why you had to leave town so suddenly? I'm so sorry, doctor, who do you think of getting in her place?"

"I—I have already got a person—a very steady good sort of woman, I believe, a Mrs. Howard. I hope you will like her, Norah," he said, constrainedly.

"Oh! I am sure to like her," replied Norah, "and, as to that, I shall have very little to do with her. I—"



"No, that is true," he interposed. "I am not anxious you should be troubled with the cares of housekeeping before your time. Well, tell me how you left everyone and everything in town."

And then the conversation grew more animated and for little more than an hour Norah and her guardian chatted pleasantly together and then they bade each other good night.

The weather continued cold and wintry, and in spite of her liking for quiet and seclusion, Norah did find the time hang rather heavily on her hands.

Thurston did not seem quite the same place it had done fifteen months before, and Rupert Hasted was changed too.

He was less and less in her society, was more distant, more grave and reserved in his manners than ever, and seemed to avoid her—or she fancied he did—and the belief caused her the bitterest pain, a grief over which she fretted and brooded not a little.

These thoughts and fancies, and the unhappiness they engendered, would cause poor Norah to pass almost sleepless nights; and, as she lay awake counting the hours till dawn, she would frequently become aware of strange sounds in the old house that would send a sudden chill to her blood and make her tremble with superstitious terror.

There were weird rustlings, soft, creeping footsteps, low murmurings about the place. In vain Norah reasoned with herself about them, and told herself that the rustling was but the stirring of the ivy leaves around her window moved by the wind, or probably disturbed by some night-bird; the footsteps, merely the creaking of the old oaken flooring; the murmurings, the moaning of the wind in the chimneys and long passages.

Though, in the day, her terrors seemed foolish indeed, at night they assumed formidable proportions and had power to render the hours of darkness terrible to her.

"It's odd," she thought one day; a day that had been passed in solitude, save for the presence of the faithful Grantham; "I've never yet been over the Court! I've asked my guardian to show me the old rooms, and though he has said 'yes,' he has never yet done it. Why should I not explore this afternoon? He's not here. I saw him ride away an hour ago, or I'd ask him to take me. I'll go alone, it will be fun, and something to do this dull afternoon!"

So, well pleased with the idea, Norah started up, wondering she had not before thought of beguiling the long hours by setting out on a voyage of discovery; and, crossing the hall, she ascended the great staircase, halting when she reached the first landing.

"Now, which way shall I go? to the left, I think. I've never been beyond the end of that passage, and I believe the oldest rooms are all in the west wing, and the passage to them lies on the further side of that swing door."

So Norah walked quickly down the passage, pushed open the swing door, and passed beyond it into a long, narrow, and deserted-looking corridor, with doors on either side of it.

"These are the rooms, I suppose!" she thought, and she pushed open the first door to the right. It disclosed a large, half-empty bedroom, scantily furnished with some quaint bits of seventeenth century furniture; it was dull, dusty and unattractive. She turned away, passed into the passage and proceeded on her way.

The next room she entered had evidently been used as a boudoir; a large mirror hung on one side of it, dainty spindle-legged table and high-backed chairs stood around; the brocaded curtains still hung at the dusty window, and the thick Turkey carpet that had once covered the floor lay in a huge roll, where for years it had been left undisturbed in a corner.

"Strange, deserted-looking old rooms," thought Norah; "but some of the furniture is lovely and the rooms are large. I wonder my guardian—but what is this?"

She stooped as she spoke and picked up something that lay in the passage—a fan, to the tarnished golden tassel of which a little knot of faded hothouse flowers were attached.

The fan was a costly one of eastern manufacture; Norah looked at it in surprise.

"If it had not been for those flowers I should have imagined it had been dropped here by one of the occupants of these rooms at least a hundred years ago," she thought. "Odd! whom can it have belonged to? What shall I do with it?"

She examined it closely; it exhaled a peculiar Eastern perfume which was disagreeable to her. She shuddered, and it fell from her hand.

"I'll just leave it where it was," she thought, "the owner, or at any rate, the person who fixed the flowers on it, will find it I daresay. Here I am at the end of the gallery. What a lovely bit of old tapestry; it's a shame to leave it mouldering here. I shall get my guardian to have it moved."

And she laid her hand on the corner of a large piece of tapestry that hung at the end of the gallery, and as she drew it towards her she perceived that it hid a door, to which it served as a screen or portière.

"Another door, and of quite a modern sort," she said to herself in surprise, for the door was one of thick scarlet baize, and moved on noiseless hinges, "where can it lead to?"

She pushed it open and found herself in a small square chamber, panelled and decorated in Eastern fashion. On the further side of it was a door precisely similar to the one she had just passed through.

With a feeling of bewildered surprise she laid her hand on it and strove to open it; but in vain, it resisted all her efforts.

She stood dazed with astonishment, looking from side to side of the strange little apartment. There was some mystery attached to it she vaguely felt, a secret she had never suspected. What should she do?

She wished she had never set out on her exploring quest. What would her guardian say if he heard of it—if he knew what she had discovered?

Sounds of voices in the distance on the further side of the locked door now startled her. For a moment she paused and listened, and then she fled back like a guilty thing to her own room.

It was a long time before she could recover herself, or get her thoughts into order. What had she seen, and what did it all mean, and whose were the voices she had heard.

Should she tell her guardian where she had been?—ask him for an explanation?—why not?

And yet, for some unexplained reason, Norah felt very unwilling to do so, and that evening she did not see Rupert. He sent word to her that he was dining at Crookfell, and would not be at home till late.

Just as she was sitting down to her lonely meal Norah saw the carriage of the Crookfell medical man drive away from the house.

"One of the servants ill again! I wonder who it is. I must ask Mrs. Howard," she thought.

Four or five days passed, and yet Norah said nothing on the subject of her visit to the old rooms to her guardian. She had almost succeeded in persuading herself that what she had seen was nothing really mysterious, and that the voices she had heard were probably but the voices of the servants in the lower rooms of the house.

Gradually the impression her adventure had produced on her wore off, the weather improved, her spirits improved with it, Rupert had passed the greater part of each day with her as of yore, and life looked far lighter and happier than it had done to her for many weeks past.

"Oh! if it were always like this," she sighed, "how happy I should be. If we were always together as we were when I first came here!" and these were her last thoughts ere she fell asleep.

Suddenly, after but a short slumber, as it seemed to her, she woke—woke, broad awake, and with a vivid consciousness that she was not alone in her room, that some one—something beside herself and Mrs. Grantham was there.

The moon shone brightly into the room through the half opened shutter.

Norah glanced towards the window, and there, just where its beams struck the polished oak floor, making it gleam and glitter as if splashed

with silver, stood a figure that made the blood curdle in her veins, and her heart almost to cease beating.

It was the figure of a woman clad in a strange fantastic fashion, such as Norah had never seen before—a tall, lithe, powerful woman, with a mass of dark luxuriant hair falling over her shoulders, something glittering in her hands over which she passed her long slender fingers caressingly, whilst her dark wild eyes, gleamed and glittered fiercely, and her lips parting in a malicious smile, showed a row of cruel dazzlingly white teeth.

Norah recognised the face at once. It was the face of her dream, the dream that had so terrified her a year ago!

There was something so cruel and malignant in it that she turned cold from head to foot as she looked. What was going to happen—who was she—what had she come for? She glanced towards Mrs. Grantham's bed; the good lady was breathing regularly, and quietly, sunk in a deep slumber. Norah dared not move nor utter a sound to rouse her. She could but lie still and horror-struck watch the dreadful face of the woman before her.

Suddenly, with one tigerish spring, as it seemed to the terrified girl, the woman was beside her bed. She saw the terrible eyes looking into her's with a cunning, treacherous leer—heard a low, chuckling, fiendish laugh, perceived that the glittering thing she held in her hand was a small, sharp dagger, and knew by instinct that it was her life the woman sought.

The moments seemed like ages, would no one—no help come! Every instant she expected to feel the cold, sharp steel in her breast—the woman's long, thin fingers at her throat! She dared not speak, she dared not cry out, she could only lie motionless, her heart full of terror, inexpressible, and her eyes hopelessly fixed on the burning orbs of the awful creature before her.

## CHAPTER VI.

How many minutes—or instants perhaps—passed thus, Norah never knew, to her they seemed ages—the bright fiendish light in the woman's eyes seemed to burn into her brain, her whole personality to be dominated by her, when suddenly she started back with a wild, mocking laugh, brandishing the sharp dagger she held aloft.

Then Norah heard a sound in the distance, a door violently slammed, the hurrying of many feet, and the spell that had bound her and kept her motionless was broken, and with a piercing cry she started up in her bed, but only instantly to feel the strong, wiry fingers of the maidwoman at her throat.

She struggled with her, catching the right arm, the hand of which held the knife, and by an extraordinary effort succeeding in holding it away from her, but her strength was rapidly failing when the door of her room was thrown violently open, and Rupert Hasted, followed by two women, Mrs. Agar and Mrs. Howard, and the doctor from Crookfell, rushed in.

At the sight of them the mad woman's anger increased to frenzy. With a wild shout of defiance and triumph she raised the dagger on high, and before Rupert could catch her hand, buried it in her own breast.

"Oh, Heaven, too late!" murmured Rupert, as he bent over her bleeding form. "Norah!—is she—in Miss Desborough hurt?"

And he looked at Norah who had sunk back half fainting, with anxious eyes.

"Stay with her and help Mrs. Grantham, Mrs. Agar," he continued, "and when Miss Desborough is recovered come to me. Mrs. Howard, Dr. Edmonds and I will look after this poor creature."

They raised the body from the ground; the face of the woman was calm and peaceful now, and her long dark hair falling across Dr. Edmonds' arm almost swept the ground, and prepared to carry her back to the western wing; but before Rupert quitted the apartment he came again to

Norah's bedside, whose senses were rapidly returning.

"Thank Heaven! She is not hurt. Oh! thank Heaven for that!" Norah heard him mutter, and for an instant his hand pressed hers, and then he was gone.

The remaining hours of the night passed slowly away; there was, of course, no further thought of sleep by either Norah or Mrs. Grantham. Mrs. Agar (of whose presence at Thurlston Norah had been in ignorance) quitted the room as soon as she found Miss Desborough required her no more, and Norah and her old friend were left to talk over matters alone.

It was a comfort to both when the night passed away and morning dawned.

There was no particular stir in the house when day began again; the servants, in their distant part of the house had heard nothing of what passed and little dreamt of the tragedy that had been enacted so near them during the hours of darkness.

Norah heard the window-shutters being opened and the fires lit, and Bella singing brightly at her work in the distance, as usual, as if nothing had happened.

"It will be best to say nothing of this, dear Gran, till I have seen Mr. Hasted," she said; "when I have spoken to him, he will tell us what to do. Oh, Gran! it was awful! That mad, wicked fate, that terrible laugh!"

"Don't think about it, dearie," said the old lady, soothingly. "Do you know, Miss Norah, I have often fancied there was something strange about Thurlston, something going on we none of us dreamt of. Oh! if you had been injured, my dear, whilst I slept on, all unconscious of your danger, I should never have forgiven myself; until I heard your cry, and Mr. Hasted rushed in I was unaware that anything was wrong. Nine o'clock's striking, and here is Ann with the water for your bath, it will refresh you, and afterwards, if you are equal to it, I will dress you, or would you like to have breakfast here first?"

"I will see; I will try to go down stairs but I feel very shaky still, Gran," replied Norah, doubtfully. A message brought by Anne from Mr. Hasted, begging her not to wait breakfast for him, settled the matter. Norah elected to remain in her own room.

It was afternoon when she and Rupert met in her own boudoir, and her heart beat rapidly as she saw him enter, very grave and pale, and then sit down on the sofa beside her.

"I can never forgive myself for all you went through last night, Norah," he said, in a low, pained voice. "Can you forgive me?"

"Dear doctor, it was no fault of yours, how could you have helped it?" began Norah.

"I ought never to have let you come here, I should have kept you away from Thurlston," he interrupted, "especially after your telling me of the dream you had, which of course was no dream but a reality. I ought not to have run the risk of—of what might—would have happened last night if I had not arrived in time to prevent it."

Norah shivered at the picture which his words raised before her eyes.

"Doctor," she faltered, "forgive me, but may I ask a question now? Who—who was—who is that poor creature? Is she still alive or—"

"She is dead," he said gravely. "She died an hour after we carried her away; the wound she gave herself was mortal! She was my wife, Norah."

"Your wife. Oh!" said Norah, shrinking from him ever so little. Then as the whole truth broke on her she laid her hand on his arm saying in a voice full of the tenderest concern,—

"Oh, doctor! I am so sorry—so very, very sorry."

"Nay, don't pity her; she is at rest, at peace," he said, solemnly. "Her senses came back to her for a few minutes and she was quite calm and in her right mind before she died. She knew me, realised what had been her state for so many years, and was glad to go. Norah, she has suffered, poor soul, and I have suffered too—no one will ever know how much, through all the years of sorrow, shame and trouble that have passed

since we met. Listen, and I will tell you the history of my youthful folly, Norah, the history of my marriage.

"I entered the army when I was about eighteen," he began, "and the first long leave of absence I took, when my regiment was stationed at the Cape, I determined to spend in the Islands of Bourbon and Mauritius. I was always fond of travelling, and a visit to these more than usually unfrequented places had a great attraction to me.

"A few weeks after leaving Cape Town, which I did in a sailing vessel, I reached Port Louis, the principal town in Mauritius, and finding the place a pleasant one and the beauty of the island even greater than I had expected, I made up my mind to remain there for some time.

"I speedily made acquaintances, not only amongst the English population but amongst the French, by far the largest and most influential portion of the community.

"Amongst the richest of the French merchants and landowners, was a M. Flambert who lived in a lovely house just outside the town on the road towards the Grande Riviere; he seemed to take a great fancy to me, and was constantly asking me to his place; and, flattered by his attentions, though I did not care much for the man himself, I frequently became his guest.

"One day as I entered the cool verandah of his house, over which grew creepers of every shade and hue, that filled the air with their fragrance, I was surprised to see a lady's garden hat, a fan, and one or two other things that denoted the presence of a lady in the house, lying about, and when I passed on into the sitting-room, which, it being mid-day, was kept in a state of semi-darkness because of the heat, I was startled by seeing a tall, slim form clad in a white robe rise suddenly from the sofa.

"You—I must beg pardon," I said; "I did not know M. Flambert had visitors—ladies here?"

"Excuse me," she replied in a soft voice, "I am neither a visitor nor a stranger, I am Mademoiselle Flambert. I arrived from Bourbon yesterday. My father told me to expect you, he will be here presently."

"She looked at me with her large, dark, soft eyes—yes, they were soft enough then—in a way that made my inexperienced heart beat quickly, and motioned me to sit down beside her on the sofa, and soon we were laughing and chatting together like old friends; and when I left her that evening I was, or fancied myself, desperately in love with her.

"She was beautiful, very beautiful then! As she lies now, cold and dead, with the quiet peace of death on her face, she reminds me of what she was then, Norah! She was beautiful, and fascinating, accomplished and clever too, and what wonder was it that she fascinated me, an unsuspecting, inexperienced young fellow of four and twenty, as I then was! How could I dream of the hideous family curse that had already threatened to show itself in her! How imagine that Flambert, the man who professed to be my friend, was inviting me to his house, leaving me for hours in his daughter's society, hoping that I might marry her, in ignorance of everything, and that he might be relieved not only from her presence in his house, where her temper—the temper she hid so carefully from me—was wont to blaze out and render his home miserable, but to save him from the burden of maintaining her in the future when the evil should have declared itself.

"Well, I won't go further with particulars. I asked Marie to marry me, and she bade me speak to her father, and ask him for her hand. French girls, as she reminded me, had little to do with their own settlement in life—the parents managed that, but, she added, seeing, I suppose, that I looked hurt at the coldness of her reply, if her father gave his consent, she would be willing—more than willing to become my wife.

"She gave me her hand as she spoke, and I remember it was icy cold. I pressed my lips to it, and she did not try to prevent me; but when I would have kissed her she turned away abruptly and pushed me from her.

"Afterwards—afterwards, not now," she said in

a warning voice and I left her, rather fearful that I had offended her by my temerity in venturing to kiss her before things were settled between me and her father. I found M. Flambert very pleasant. After a few trivial objections, a little half-hearted opposition, he agreed to our marriage—told me the amount of his daughter's small fortune, and how it had always been his great desire that when she married, Europe might be her future home. The East did not suit her, although she had been born and brought up in Mauritius. When was my leave up? When did I think of rejoining my regiment? My heart trembled a little as I told him that in four months I ought to set out on my return journey to the Cape.

"Could he make up his mind to part with his daughter so soon; it was my fervent desire to take her back with me to Cape Town when I rejoined. M. Flambert seemed to hesitate—so soon!—he had hoped to keep his dear Marie with him for yet another year; but yet, if she were willing and I wished it, he would not stand in our way.

"A month would suffice for arrangements, and then the wedding might take place. Our honeymoon might be passed at Bourbon, or on an estate he possessed in the island, and when the time came for leaving we could proceed to Cape Town by steamer.

"I listened almost bewildered. In a month—one short month—and Marie would be mine. I could hardly believe it. Marie manifested neither surprise nor any great amount of pleasure, when M. Flambert informed her of these arrangements a little later, and gave her his blessing. She was very quiet and silent all the remainder of the evening, sitting with her dark eyelashes resting on her cheek, and her eyes fixed on the ground, her long slender fingers clasping and unclasping themselves constantly—a movement I soon learnt to know well, and to dread.

"Well! we were married; and, for the first month all went well. Marie was not very demonstrative but no doubt in time she would learn to love me better, and to be less reserved, I thought, and I dreamt of the happy days that we should pass together in the future, and believed myself to be the happiest man on earth. My dream of happiness did not last long, however. When the time for our departure drew nigh, Marie evinced the greatest repugnance to leaving Port Louis. In vain I explained to her I had no choice but to go, she grew more and more agitated, vowed she could not tear herself away from home, that I might go, she would remain with her father. I could then resign the service if I chose, and we could in future live at Port Louis on her income and the small fortune I possessed.

"But M. Flambert had no idea of such an arrangement being carried out. He refused to allow his daughter to remain under his roof, she had married me of her own free will, and her place was with her husband.

"She cried and entreated, and finally turned sulky and silent. Then, the week before we were to sail, the crash came. I returned from the town one day, suspecting nothing, to find my wife in a state of violent mania and to be attacked by her with such virulence, that had it not been for the help of some neighbours I should certainly not have survived to tell the tale.

"Little by little I learnt the truth. Learnt that Marie had never loved me, that all the love she had to give had been given to a Creole cousin (yes, she had negro blood in her veins, that, too, I learnt) whose addresses her father had forbidden, and that she loved him still—that, as I said before, knowing the fate that would certainly fall on her one day Flambert had been glad to see her married to any suitable party ere it showed itself, and so shift the burden of her care and maintenance on other shoulders. Her own mother it seemed had died in the same fearful state as she was now in!

"I did all I could for her, Norah. I put her under the care of the most skillful doctor in the island, but when a couple of years later I revisited Port Louis, I found her no better. Then I went to Burmah leaving her still in her native place; but, when I left the East for good seven years ago, I found the doctor under whose charge I had left her, was dead, and during the stay I made at Port Louis I was not satisfied that the treatment she was receiving was for the best, and



resolved to bring her home with me to Thurlston and see what I could do for her. No one knew she was my wife. No one—at least very few people knew of her presence at Thurlston, there had been rumours that I had a patient in the house but they died out, and perhaps people imagined my patient had left me.

"The rest you know, Norah. My treatment was no more successful than M. Villetot's had been—or than Dr. Edmunds' was. How she managed to secrete the dagger she killed herself with and to elude the vigilance of her two nurses, will never be known—the curing of sufferers from her phase of the complaint is extraordinary; but I shall always reproach myself that I was not more careful—did not take even greater precautions—personally I could do nothing, for my presence often seemed to be unendurable to her. She knew me at the last though, Norah, and we parted friends."

## CHAPTER VII.

A SAD story of a life wrecked by unmerited misfortune and cruel treachery. So thought Norah after Rupert left her, and oh! how her heart bled for her guardian as she realised what he must have suffered—how all the early part of his life—those years that should have been the happiest of his existence had been embittered and rendered miserable.

And yet how well he had come through the ordeal! Misfortune and trouble had not hardened him or rendered him cold, suspicious, or unsympathetic. On the contrary, it seemed but to have softened and sweetened his disposition. Suffering and sorrow had taught him their most valuable lessons—to feel for those who suffer, to sympathise with the sorrowful and stricken around him. But it was over now, he was free, the burden had been removed at last, the shadow lifted from his life. And Norah prayed with a heart full of compassion for his past troubles that his future might be a happy one—that he might be recompensed for all he had gone through, for all his goodness to the woman who had never loved him, and whose existence was a perpetual trial to him. How he had nursed her, cared for her, consulted all her whims and fancies, kept her with him, because in her lucid intervals her dread of being separated from him again and consigned to the hands of strangers was so acute. How, all that care and money could do had been done to render her existence tolerable, to cure her if possible!

Rupert spoke to her of his past once more, telling her many incidents in it, and then by mutual consent the subject was dropped between them for ever—each resolved it should never be mentioned to the other again.

So the winter passed away and spring came, it wanted but a few short days to Norah's twenty-first birthday. The snow had disappeared early, and the spring had covered the hills with verdure, and scattered thousands of wild flowers over the short soft turf; the lake looked blue and still and peaceful, and the air was soft and balmy, yet fresh, with the freshness only to be found in mountain regions.

"I've had some letters to-day, Norah, letters of importance," said Rupert, entering the sitting-room that Norah called her own, a quaint oak-panelled apartment commanding a lovely view of the distant hills from its window, "the first is from Mr. Ellerslie, he will be here on Thursday."

"Ah, and we shall know all about those wonderful 'provisions' he hinted at when we saw him in London," interrupted Norah, smiling.

"Yes—are you very anxious to know, then?" replied Rupert.

"Not in the least," laughed she. "Money does not give happiness, doctor, of that I am convinced, though it is equally true that the want of it is a real evil. Well, what other letters have you?"

"Two others in which you are interested, Norah," he said with a look of anxiety, and yet with a half smile on his lips. "The first, a final offer from Mr. Reginald Browne—"

"Oh, that terrible young man! Doctor, how

difficult it is to make some people realise you loathe them," cried Norah. "Well, you must answer it, and do try to make him understand this time that I—well!—that I positively dislike him, and that what he asks is impossible."

"I will try to do so, but the young man is hard to convince," answered Rupert smiling, "and after all I feel very sorry for him, I am sure in his way he loves you, and of course your refusal gives him pain."

"But you wouldn't have me accept him, surely?" cried Norah.

"Most decidedly not. I would not give my consent to your marrying him, even, and you know my consent is necessary to your taking such a step—for the present, at any rate. But I have another letter—another proposal for you here, Norah, and if you should wish to accept it, I—well, I should feel it my duty not to hinder you."

"Who—who is it?" asked Norah, in a peculiar tone, "not that it matters, I—"

"Indeed it does, it is an excellent offer. Lord Carlingfield (you remember him at Rome, Norah) wishes you to be his wife. He would have asked you long ago, but was called away from Rome so suddenly by his mother's illness and death, and when he returned he found you gone. He writes a very good letter. Money, fortune, he says, is nothing to him, and I believe it. He loves you for yourself alone. It is my duty to tell you, Norah, that his offer is a very flattering one, that you are never likely to have a better. Lord Carlingfield is young, rich, clever, and—"

"But there is one objection I have to him, doctor," said Norah, with a dangerous sparkle in her eyes and a nervous compression of her lips, "an objection that outweighs all these advantages which I admit are great."

"And that is?" asked Rupert, breathlessly.

"That I do not love him, doctor," she answered. "Oh! surely you know that you—you can't have lived with me all this time and—and not have seen—you must know that."

And turning away suddenly, Norah burst into a passion of tears.

In a moment Rupert had thrown down the letters and was on his knees beside her.

"Norah, my dear child, my dear one, what is it? What have I said to hurt you?" he asked, in an agitated voice. "Norah, what do these tears mean? What is it I have said—I, who would die rather than cause you a moment's unhappiness! Look at me, dear, and tell me you are not really hurt—angry with me."

And he strove to draw away the hands that hid her face from his sight.

She raised her head from the cushion on which it leaned and her hand which he had taken rested in his.

(Continued on page 283.)

## HIS TRUE WORTH.

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### CHAPTER XXI.

"Of course it rests entirely with your-elf," went on Miss Arabella more kindly—"whether Dick shall come, or whether Dick shall stop away. In either case, as I said before, I intend to write to him to-night."

"I say, let him come," repeated Hildegard.

"Very well, my dear, then it's settled."

"I tell you, Aunt Bella," Hildegard continued, a slight flush staining cheek and brow, "that I should really feel hurt, if such an old friend of ours as Richard Falkland were to go so far away without seeing us before he went. For my own part, I do not quite understand why he should go out to India at all. He is succeeding well enough at home—and he may not return for years."

"He may never return—because he may die out there of fever," corrected Aunt Bella dolorously, staring fixedly ahead of her again, a catch in her breath taking her unawares; "or he may get stabbed by some treacherous native or other."

A lot of people out in India, lately, so I've read in the papers at odd times, have been stabbed in the back by treacherous natives. Indeed, as everyone knows, it is a regular place for snakes and tigers and daggers and poison. Alive one day, and dead the next. That is the way the world wags in India. And the north-western provinces are notoriously unhealthy," sighed Miss Arabella, in dismal conclusion.

"Oh, pray do not say any more," exclaimed Hildegard, with a genuine shudder.

"But, there, it would not make a pin's difference to you, Hildegard," Miss Bella went on, in a reproachful sort of way, "if anything dreadful did befall poor Dick. The past notwithstanding, he is nothing to you."

"The past notwithstanding, he is still my friend," Hildegard answered, almost passionately.

"He was never your friend," Miss Arabella said, with emphasis and meaning; then she added more gently, noting Hildegard's pained look at the words, "Well, my dear, I must confess, I'm like you—I cannot see why in the world he should want to quit his native land. It is only the ne'er-do-wells who go abroad, generally speaking; and no one can justly describe Richard as a ne'er-do-well. Leaving his mother in her old age, too! I should never have thought it of him! And I wonder what good he thinks he will do by gadding over the sea. Heigho! the boy is thoroughly unsettled, I expect, and feels that—"

"Let us go in, Aunt Bella," interrupted Hildegard quietly. "The tide is on the turn, and the air is growing cold. Come!"

She shivered slightly as she spoke, and rose from the garden seat. Miss Arabella Trott followed her example.

"Yes, we will go in," she agreed willingly. "Bay how beautiful the moon looks out yonder, Hildegard, rising and shimmering over the sea."

So they left the deserted little jetty, and climbed the cliff steps to the hotel.

They found their rooms brilliantly lighted; the urn and tea-cups ready for use; and the big staring plate-glass windows open to the salt sea-breeze.

Passing through the brand-new dining room, on her way to the equally brand-new looking drawing-room, a white object caught the eye of Hildegard, upon the table beneath the chandelier.

It was the newspaper addressed to herself in the handwriting of Mrs. Brittle, the house-keeper at Courtgardeau.

Miss Arabella had gone to take off her bonnet and wrap.

Hildegard Ray, standing alone there by the table, opened and unfolded the broad sheets with but a languid interest in them.

Their contents could not in any way concern her.

She found soon that there were two newspapers, one rolled up within the other, and both of them, too, of an old date.

The first was a *Times* for the twenty-third of the past April; the second, a *Times* for the twenty-sixth of the same month.

From somewhere between the stiff and rather soiled sheets a slip of note-paper fell out, whereon were scrawled a few lines, again in the handwriting of Mrs. Brittle.

"Oh, Mrs. Brittle this is wrong—altogether wrong, you know," Hildegard murmured idly—"hoodwinking the Postmaster General, and defrauding Her Majesty's revenue."

She half smiled as she stooped and picked up the fallen scrawl; and then she read the undated message.

It ran thus,—

"HONOURED MADAM,

"I have thought somehow that you cannot have seen much of the papers, where you are at present, or I fancy we should have heard something of you here at home before now, where everyone in Drummerfield is talking of the dreadful news."

"After thinking the matter over, Madam, I herewith take the liberty of forwarding to the hotel at Penarthur these two *Times* newspapers,

which I humbly hope you will pardon if, in doing so, I have done wrong.

"With my respectful duty, I remain, honoured madam, always your obedient servant to command,

"MARY JANE BRITTLE."

"P.S.—Miss Georgie, at the Moat House, they say, is simply crushed."

Having mastered the contents of this brief epistle, Hildegard Ray next glanced wonderingly and apprehensively over the first page of the last-dated paper, that of April 26th.

And here her sight became riveted on the record of two deaths, which the housekeeper at Courtgardens, in order to distinguish them from others above and below them, had marked all round with her pen.

"On the 20th April, at the Moat House, Dr. Drummerfield, Warwickshire, Alicia Louisa, Lady St. Austell; in the 53rd year of her age."

And next in order to it, this other chronicle,—  
"On the 20th April, having been one of the passengers in the wrecked Lisbon steam-packet *Donna Anna*, Ughtred Lord St. Austell, of the Moat House, Drummerfield, Warwickshire; in his 32nd year."

Then Hildegard Ray sank down heavily upon a chair by the table, and buried her face in her hands.

When she raised her head to the light again she looked as she had looked on that gray November day in the library at Courtgardens, when she had proved, beyond all doubt or dispute, her lover's utter worthlessness.

"Why should I grieve," she said, with a tearless hard sob, "since he is gone now for ever? Why should I mourn him, since he never loved me—ever? Oh, may Heaven forgive you, Ughtred St. Austell, as I forgive you now!"

She turned to the other newspaper, the one dated April 23rd, and found automatically therein an account of the loss of the ill-fated *Donna Anna*.

Miss Arabella Trott, entering the room briskly, next as the proverbial new pin and ready for her tea, discovered, to her amazement, Hildegard, all dressed as she had left her ten minutes before, with a crumpled newspaper spread over the table, and, with her head and arms resting on the printed broad-sheet before her, weeping stormily now as though her heart would break.

"Hildegard, Hildegard," exclaimed the little old lady, "what has happened now—what in the world is the matter, Hildegard?"

Hildegard rose wearily, and pushed back the tear-wetted love-locks which had strayed rebelliously over her eyes.

"I want to go home—I must go home—home to Drummerfield and Georgie," she said, incoherently, but pointing to Mrs. Brittle's old newspapers for Miss Arabella's further enlightenment. "Georgie, you see, is all alone—I must go and comfort her, Aunt Bella. Let us have our things put up at once—Jennings can do it to-night—and we will start early tomorrow."

Miss Arabella only stared in mute astonishment.

"What can you be talking about!" she exclaimed at last. "I really should be glad if you would kindly explain, my dear!"

"Oh, those papers will explain it all," returned Hildegard forlornly. "Look at them—read them!"

So bewildered little Miss Trott obeyed her kinswoman, and gathered together for perusal those alien messengers which Mrs. Brittle had deemed it expedient to forward to Penarthur.

Aunt Bella saw immediately those ominous ink lines, and in another moment she had read the words they enclosed.

She was infinitely shocked, and the newspaper dropped from her hands to the floor.

For she, like Hildegard herself, well nigh out of the world or at the world's end, in that huddling, quiet, southern Cornish village, had heard of no recent disaster at sea—had dreamed of no tragedy at home at Drummerfield!

"Both on the same day!"

Miss Bella repeated the sentence in a hushed tone, over and over again, as if the full meaning

of the words was too difficult and too awful for her mind to grasp and comprehend.

"Both on the same day!"

"And now," urged Hildegard passionately, "you can understand why I must go home. Remember Georgie! Think how lonely, how desolate, she must be at the Moat House—now! And recollect too, Aunt Bella," she added, her drooping head and quivering lips half averted as she spoke, "that—that she loved *him* as well as I. I, then, can comfort her as no one else in the world could. Oh, let us leave this place to-morrow!"

But, shocked and subdued as Miss Bella unquestionably was by the grave tidings which had just reached them at Penarthur, she yet could not hinder her thoughts from running on her nephew Richard Falkland at the same time.

Her ideas were disarranged, and all in confusion; yet somehow poor Dick was uppermost in them at the moment.

"We can do no good in the world by returning home to-morrow, my dear Hildegard," she reasoned tenderly, "for it appears that these sad events happened days—many days—ago. Rest well assured that Georgie Walmer is being properly cared for and looked after—there are many kind and friendly souls in Drummerfield. You see, I am going to write to Richard this evening, and he is safe to be here with us in a few days' time. And if we do not wait for him here in Penarthur, we shall never see him again, perhaps for years and years. For I do not think," supplemented Miss Arabella very seriously, "that he would care over-much about coming to Courtgardens to say his long good-bye. Do you, dear?"

There was no response. In miserable silence Hildegard stood, with her hands clasped behind her.

"Send word to poor little Georgie," went on Miss Bella diplomatically, "that you will be with her—say in a week hence. Writing to her, Hildegard, will do you good; as much good as seeing her."

Hildegard only sighed deeply again.

She felt too weak and battered either to resist or to argue—and so she gave in.

"Do you promise me faithfully, Aunt Bella, that you will take me from Penarthur in a week hence?" she questioned tiredly.

"I promise you faithfully, my dear. I only desire to wait to see Richard."

"Thank you—I know that I can trust you, Aunt Bella. Now I am going to my room; for if you do not mind, I should like to be alone."

"Mind, Hildegard! Go, by all means, my dear!"

So Hildegard went away to her own bed-chamber; there alone, with the sound of the sea alike in her heart and in her ear, to weep her last tears over a vanished dream.

"I will take her in some tea presently," said Aunt Bella to herself, as she sat by one of the open windows of the hotel drawing room, and stared at the slender little black jetty in the starlight, and at the wide dark level waters reflecting that tremulous starshine.

But soon Aunt Bella turned her eyes from their contemplation of the lone dark sea; for she remembered that Ughtred St. Austell, cold and dead, was lying somewhere in its troubled depths.

Three whole days and a half went by, and then Richard Falkland appeared at Penarthur.

The afternoon on which he was expected was a glorious one—a drowsy, "blue-unclouded" afternoon, with a great hot sunny stillness brooding over all Penarthur and Penarthur's Bay.

There was not even so much as a breath or a sigh of a breeze to wrinkle the smooth blue waters of the bay, and the brawny brown fishermen, constrained to idleness, were dozing on the beach, or mending their nets, under the bulging sides and shadow of their stranded boats.

There was no speck visible upon the wide deep-blue below; never a cloud was to be seen in Heaven's vast blue overhead.

All the green blinds of the windows of the lodging houses of Penarthur were closed or low-

ered; the earth and all things earthly at Penarthur village were asleep or resting in the dead still sunshine.

"I darsay Aunt Bella would rather meet him alone," mused Hildegard, perhaps just a thought uncomfortable at the prospect of seeing Richard Falkland again.

And so, luncheon over, as the church clock was chiming a quarter past two, she left the hotel quietly, unobserved and unmixed by Miss Arabella, and wended her way down the hot, steep cliff to the stilly and pebbly street below.

## CHAPTER XXII.

THE train which Richard was coming by would arrive at half past two o'clock—he had sent on a telegram to tell them—so that he must have been travelling for the greater part of the night; because Penarthur was a long distance from Cheshire.

Miss Arabella, when once she had "got hold" of him, as she expressed it to herself, meant to do her persuasive best to keep Dick with her until the following day; albeit she was perfectly aware that her task would be no easy one; for how could Richard Falkland remain, with safety and with peace of mind, in the same place and beneath the same roof that must shelter Hildegard Ray as well as himself?

When the little junction train at half-past two steamed into Penarthur station, Hildegard was far away under the weed-grown and tufted cliffs, and could no longer see the red-tiled village.

The tide was out, and the rocks and boulders were bare, with shell-fish glued to their damp and slimy base; in the pools amid the yellow waste of sand the shrimps and young crabs were sporting together.

She strolled on thoughtfully until she came to a huge dry boulder higher up on the shore, and backed by the frowning crags.

Here she sat down, and folded her hands in her lap.

The distant blue water made no sound; the peevish cry of the white-winged sea-birds alone broke the silence of the place.

The blue of the sky seemed to touch the blue of the ocean, and to blend on the horizon line into a perfect whole.

Patches of tangled seaweed strewn the shore here and there; and here and there, too, a spar of driftwood, seaweed-wreathed, told of stormy and direful nights on that perilous and crag-bound coast.

The silence soothed Hildegard—she scarcely heard the seagulls screaming around their rocky, weed-grown homes overhead.

She was thinking, perhaps, how happy must be the fisherman's wife, with that great boundless sea for ever before her eyes, and with the tones of its mighty voice always and for ever in her ears!

And then she thought listlessly that the lot of the fisher's wife was not so much to be envied in reality; for after all there must be a terrible sadness in the moaning hollow voice of the waves boasting everlastingly of the treasures—the precious lives—that they from time to time had swallowed up. Those poor hapless drowned dead that the sea must "give up" some day!

How could Hildegard naturally help thinking of Ughtred St. Austell as she sat there that afternoon on that beautiful, lonely shore!—of the ill-fated *Donna Anna* and its watery grave almost within sight of home; and of Georgie Walmer, alone in the old Moat House at Drummerfield, to whom she had already written a long and generous letter, full of sympathy and love, to say that she would be with her soon, to comfort and help her in her loneliness and her sorrow!

He—Ughtred St. Austell—had had so much to do with the life of Hildegard, he had wrought so much, indeed, alike to brighten and to shadow it, that it was out of the range of human probability, she well knew, for her ever to forget that she had once known and loved him.

She had forgiven him—but to forget was another thing.



Ah, no—to the end of her existence she must remember Ughtred St. Austell!

And sitting alone there on the boulder, with idly clasped hands, she bowed her head suddenly and wept.

She dried her eyes presently, however, and resumed the old, wistful, forlorn attitude.

Someone uttering her name close to the boulder, startled her greatly.

"Miss Ray," said a gentle, humble voice.

She looked up then, with a little glad cry of surprise, and beheld Richard Falkland.

There he stood, barely a yard from her, and not altered in the least degree since she last saw him. He was never the man to wear his heart upon his sleeve; for his nature had always been a strong and cheerful one; and, though he had felt keenly and suffered much and deeply, because of Hildegard, there was yet no outward, no visible sign whatever to tell of that which, in secret, he had borne so bravely and endured so heroically all along.

Hildegard rose from her seat on the shore immediately, and, not without emotion, held out her hand to him.

"I am very glad to meet you again—and are you quite well?" she said, fast regaining her customary frank and gracious manner.

He told her rather sheepishly that he was quite well, and thanked her, taking the proffered hand, but letting it go quickly. As he was not altogether sure of himself, he resolved to be wise in time.

He never boasted of his moral strength now. The memory of that night of the ball at Courtgardens would be always a wholesome lesson and a warning.

"Do not be angry," said he, "because I have been bold enough to seek and find you here. Forgive me," he went on hurriedly and deprecatingly—"I was so impatient, so eager to see you, I could not wait for your return. I inquired for you, Miss Ray—I really did—the moment I got in from the station; and Aunt Bella said that she supposed you were out on the shore somewhere; you often were when the tide was out; and she said, too, that she did not think you would mind if I came along here to look for you. So please do not be angry," he murmured pleadingly again.

"I am not angry, Richard," she returned, kindly. "Will you not sit down and rest? You must be very tired with travelling for so long—and it is nice and cool here. I do not think of going in just yet, you know."

To prove this, she sat down again in her old place as she spoke; and so Richard seated himself likewise—settling himself near her on the sand among the seaweed.

Then he said—and his bright brown eyes grew brighter, almost feverish—

"I cannot stay long, you know, much as I should like to linger—and that is the reason why I was so impatient to find you, Miss Ray. My train leaves Penarthur in an hour or so. You see, I must get back just as early as possible; there is so much still to be done before I sail. To-night, in all probability, I shall sleep at Exeter, and to-morrow I hope to be in London. I came down here to Penarthur simply to wish you good-bye, Miss Ray," said he sadly; "and it was good of you, indeed, to accord me the privilege. I never should have dreamed of coming without your permission through Aunt Bella, believe me."

"You astonish me," remarked Hildegard, quietly—"and disagreeably so. I imagined that you would surely have remained with us at least until to-morrow!"

He shook his head slowly.

"We will treat you well, Richard," she smiled, with perhaps a dangerous gentleness and interest in his welfare.

"Do you doubt it then, that you wish to run away from us so soon?"

Then he looked at her narrowly, for the first time since he had found her there alone on the shore.

He noted jealously the lines of suffering about her beautiful mouth, the melancholy shadow in the rare, gray eyes. He fancied somehow, too, that

she had been crying, and he knew of course in his heart that she could not be happy.

"Hildegard," said the young man, at once, simply and earnestly, "do not tempt me to stay! You know as well as I know myself that I am best away from Penarthur—miles and miles away! In fact, I am almost beginning to wish that I had never come here at all, you look so deeply unhappy. Your dear face will haunt me in its sadness. I shall never forget it, Hildegard."

In the far distance the tide was rippling and crawling in; the dark blue-green water, curled with white foam, was kissing the sunken rocks, the growing waves were bringing in home with them a soft fresh salt breeze that would be welcome, forsooth, to the sun-scorched pebbly streets of Penarthur.

Richard Falkland on the crimped, yellow sand, by the side once more of the woman he worshipped, was hugging his long knees, and staring out over the sea—staring, yet seeing nothing.

Hildegard from her higher resting-place looked down upon him as she answered seriously:

"Did you expect to find me looking joyous, then, Richard, knowing all that I have lived through lately? Did you honestly expect to find me gay—light-hearted and gay?"

"I did not want to find you miserable," the young man rejoined, his voice very touching in its discontent. "And it nearly breaks my heart outright, Hildegard, to—see you looking as you do."

"Richard," said she, speaking to him as a sister might speak—and now she touched his arm—"be reasonable and reflect. Think of my past, I say, and be reasonable. It was only the other evening that I heard of the loss of the steamboat *Donna Anna*; and he—he—you know whom I mean—was one of the passengers, as doubtless you are aware?"

"Yes," said Dick, quietly, "the story of the wreck was in all the papers."

"It came upon me very suddenly," she continued brokenly, "just as I was beginning to feel better and perhaps more resigned than I had felt for a long while past. He—he—you understand—and his mother were summoned from the world both on the same day—an awful thought, Richard—and they were both of them dear to me once. It was all so sudden—do not ask me to look happy yet!"

The sad tears welled up, but she brushed them aside impatiently. "I am still pitifully weak, you see," she added, with a wan weary smile which made Dick's heart to ache again.

"I am a brute," said he humbly, "forgive me, Hildegard,"—raising his faithful eyes to her—"I wonder whether you have the faintest, the remotest idea why I am going to India? I am sure that you haven't—not your eyes speak for themselves. Well, I am going for your sake, Hildegard—solely for your dear sake."

"For my sake, Richard!" she echoed, her sad tones full of wonderment. "And not then for your own?"

"Well, yes, perhaps for my own, too," he answered, slowly. Then he went on in his old cheery way, though his brown eyes were sorrowful enough—

"You will laugh at me, doubtless, but that I cannot help; for I am going, Hildegard, in the fond, wild hope of returning home, at some distant day or other, and finding you unmarried! I am really, preposterous, of course, as the idea must seem to you—of coming back to England a famous and a wealthy man, so that no odious inequality of either riches or position shall any longer stand between us to prevent my winning you in the end. It may be years and years hence, Hildegard, and we may both of us be middle-aged at the time—perhaps quite old and gray; but that fact in my eyes would make not the slightest difference. For me, you would be lovely still, and I should love you just the same as ever. So, should I ever return in the way I mean, and find you still Hildegard Ray, that is how things must be. I will make you love me somehow, Hildegard. You shall be mine at last."

Hildegard was moved in spite of herself. His simple straightforward goodness, his thorough honesty of purpose, his complete unselfishness in

noble aims touched her very soul. Once more she leaned over him, and placed her hand upon his arm.

"Do you know that I think you are very foolish and quixotic, Richard?" she said, gently, "to entertain, even for one moment, that wild idea of yours of venturing and risking so much for me. Supposing that you were to win wealth, what good would it be? Suppose—I merely say, suppose—that everything were to happen and turn out, you know, as you so fondly hope that it may eventually—why, those wonderful riches of yours would be quite superfluous, absolutely superfluous, and ridiculously unnecessary, would they not? For should not I have enough then? Have I not, indeed, enough now?"

## CHAPTER XXIII.

He started up from the sand and seaweed, literally holding his breath.

Her words seemed to him so full of sweetness and distinct promise that, hearing them, he turned quite giddy for a moment.

He heard indistinguishably, as in a dream, the distinct lapping and purring of the wavelets, and the peevish plaining of the wheeling gulls; but time and spot and space, in reality, were alike forgotten just then, in the species of brief delirium her words had brought about.

Poor Dick was simply dazed for a while.

"Have you not enough?" he exclaimed at last. "My dear, my dear, it is that you have too much!"

He knelt down on the sand at her feet, as he had once knelt to her in the conservatory at Courtgardens.

"Oh, Hildegard, my Hildegard, if you were only as poor as I am, we might be happy even yet! For, my dear, you could not hold out for ever against the strength of my deep, true love! Hildegard, Hildegard," he entreated, "give me one word of hope, only a word—do not send me away despairing from you without it! It will keep me brave and steadfast and cheerful through all the stretch of the weary years to come. Oh, Hildegard, my heart's dearest, my soul's desire, pity at least the great love I bear you, and grant me that word of hope!"

How true, how noble he was, she thought—the truest, the noblest nature that ever she had known, she acknowledged meekly to herself.

Was it wise, was it, indeed, actually right, she found herself wondering, to ignore, to esteem so lightly a devotion so rare as his?

Yet what could she do, not loving him?

What could she do, what ought she to do, with the shadow of that lost love between them?

For some seconds she remained silent and thoughtful, whilst Richard knelt imploringly at her feet.

Should she explain to him what was passing through her mind? Should she tell him, honestly and unreservedly, of what she was thinking then?

She opened her lips to speak, then closed them. She opened them once more, then hesitated. Finally she decided—her mind in the end was made up.

She would speak.

"Rise, Richard," she said, calmly. "I want to say something—I want to talk the matter over with you quietly."

He obeyed her at once, and sat down by her side; this time unconsciously upon the edge of the boulder. He placed his elbows on his knees, and leaning forward as he sat, shielded his eyes with those strong brown hands of his.

"I came only to say good-bye," he groaned, "and yet what have I not done again!"

Hildegard was very pale. Her voice was firm and unflinching nevertheless.

"Richard," she began, "let us come to an understanding this afternoon. I think it is scarcely needful to tell you that I can never love again as I once loved the dead. All that I had in my heart to give, that I freely gave to him. It can never, as it were, be my own again to bestow, if I would, upon another.

"All the tenderness, all the affection I was,



"MISS RAY, I AM VERY GLAD TO MEET YOU AGAIN," SAID A GENTLE, HUMBLE VOICE.

capable of feeling in those days, I proffered him for acceptance. You know, Richard, how it was wasted—how it was secretly scorned.

"I am a woman now, as one may say, with no heart—with a heart at least that is passionless; and, at the same time, with all my wealth, with all my worldly advantages, I am a supremely lonely woman—and as a woman unloved and lonely I had thought, now, to remain until the end.

"What I am desirous to make you understand, Richard, to impress upon you fully, is, that at the expiration of these long distant years, concerning the fulfilment of which you talk so confidently and so earnestly, I should feel towards you—I am convinced—only and precisely as I do at the present time, and should love you no more, and no less, than I do at this moment of speaking.

"Can you comprehend my meaning? Can you follow me, Richard? I mean, you know, that whether you were rich or poor, famous or obscure, my feelings towards you would remain always the same—then as to-day.

"I shall ever continue to look upon you as a dear, dear friend, but anything beyond that—no! for it could never be.

"So why should you go away and leave me when there is naught to be gained—except for your own particular personal good, perhaps—by your so doing?

"If you are willing to take me as I am—though I am a great deal too old for you, Richard, as I reminded you at Courtgardens, months ago—and will accept the poor affection, the friendly regard and esteem, I can offer you only, in return for your own lavish love, then I am willing to come to you at once, Richard.

"Waiting, as I have endeavoured to prove to you, would do us no good, would serve no earthly purpose whatever. In that vain and useless waiting we should be simply wasting the best part of our lives.

"And should you now refuse to take me on

the terms I have suggested—why, I shall go down to my grave, my friend, unwedded and unloved.

"It is you, Richard, I say—you or none."

She ceased, and drew a deep sigh of relief. She had managed to say fairly well that which she had wished to be said. When she stopped speaking, Richard Falkland, for the second time that afternoon, sprang suddenly to his feet.

He stood there before Hildegarde, his back to the rippling, sun-flecked sea.

Could it be possible that she was merely playing with him, he wondered? Gracious Heaven! was she fooling him, simply fooling him, in cruel sport?

"Am I to believe," he cried out passionately, his burning eyes searching her beautiful serene face, as she sat quietly on the boulder with restful, folded hands—"Am I, then, to believe that you consent to become my wife, poor, obscure, and nameless though I am; that you consent to forget wholly the gulf—the vast difference in our relative positions—which the world would say should be more than sufficient to keep us asunder until our lives' end? Hildegarde, tell me—is this thing possible? You are in earnest? You are not seeking to—"

"May I not dare to hope then," she interrupted gently, "that you will endeavour to forget your pride, your aspirations for name and fame, my unlucky wealth, your own poverty—everything, indeed, except that I cannot let you go? You would give up anything, you would forget everything, for my sake," she added, with very sweet and needless reproach, "if you really and truly loved me, Richard."

"Hildegarde!"

Even yet, poor lad, he could not believe her—or, rather, he could not yet bring himself to believe his own ears.

"Oh, Richard!" said she pathetically, "do not leave me. I implore you to stay and shield me always with the protection of your great love. Comfort me with it, Richard—for I need it sorely. And I am so lonely, too! There is—there is danger in the sea, you know; do not cross it! He—he—"

she could not force herself to utter the dead man's name—"was lost in its cruel waters; and a like dreadful fate may be awaiting you, my friend. That must not be—no, no, no! I know that I cannot love you as I should and as you deserve—though I would trust you before all the world—yet neither can I let you go. It is selfish of me, Richard, I know it well; but—but I am weak, and cannot help it!

"I implore you once again, to forget, henceforward, those dreams of greatness you have dreamed for my sake, and for your own, and to take me, just as I am—since you care for me so well and so truly—into the shelter of your kind heart for ever. Richard, I am in solemn earnest. Is it yes or no?"

He could doubt no longer.

True, when all was said and done, it was little enough to offer him; but Richard Falkland was more than satisfied.

He discerned that she was, in truth, in sober earnest, as she herself had declared; and he accepted in boundless gratitude the poor and barren offering—poor and barren forsooth in reality—without either murmuring or pleading against the hardness of the unequal bargain, without even so much as a sigh!

How could he withstand so mighty a temptation when he loved her more dearly than life—better than himself, and all the world together!

And then she found herself lifted from the rock, and taken straightway, vehemently, to his loyal boyish heart; whilst the foam-capped wavelets, creeping insidiously nearer and nearer, seemed to be whispering mysteriously of rest after the heat and the toil of the day.

(To be continued.)

IN SIAM, when a funeral is passing, the women take down their hair and unfasten their beads, and the men fumble around in their pockets for some little piece of metal to hold between their teeth.





"I AM MY MOTHER'S AMBASSADOR, MISS DURANT," SAID PERCY FELLOWES.

## UNDER A CLOUD.

### CHAPTER VIII.

He loved Olive Durant, and there was a secret in her life; either discovery would have filled Percy Fellowes with dismay, but the two together utterly bewildered him, and he sat up late into the small hours of that summer's night thinking over the girl who had come so strangely into their midst, and of whom they knew so little.

Percy loved Olive passionately, though the knowledge had only just come upon him his love was yet so strong and intense he knew it would last their lives, but he never for a moment thought of wooing her. Between them was the barrier of her wealth. Percy was only the heir to an encumbered estate, and while his father lived he would have to depend on his own earnings.

Miss Durant possessed a hundred thousand pounds, and would probably have a great deal more when her father's affairs were wound up. The very fact that his sister had found her a lonely wanderer and brought her home, that she probably owed her life to Barbara's kindness, made it, Percy thought, more impossible for him to propose to such an heiress. His people were almost her only friends in England, she loved them dearly; he believed she liked him as a friend, and there alone, in the silence of that summer night, he registered a solemn oath to be to her ever a true and faithful friend, to stand between her and danger, to help and advise her as a brother might have done, even if it came at the last to drawing back to yield the place nearest her to a lover worthy of her choice.

So much for his own hopeless love, but Olive's secret was a far different matter. It was strange, unnatural even, that so young a girl should seclude herself deliberately in a quiet country place like High Cliff; granted, she did not care to go into society so soon after her father's death, there were many nights in London which would have

been interesting to anyone brought up in a distant colony.

Olive, who had such a keen intelligence, such a love of art and literature, would surely have enjoyed the opportunities to increase her knowledge of both that great London could have given her.

She never spoke of the last months of her stay in South Africa; she would talk freely of her childhood and its pleasures, of her delight when she had done with lessons and became mistress of her father's house; but she never mentioned the time that followed, just, as excepting old Dr. Evans, she never spoke of a single person she had known in her southern home, it was not that she had forgotten, Percy knew that the sudden sight of an African view, the sudden sound of the name of her own home even brought the tears into her eyes. No, Olive Durant had not forgotten.

She had some secret in her past, and there was someone connected with that past whom she feared meeting. Of that, Percy felt pretty sure, for when Sir George, thinking to give her pleasure, had offered to take her to a drawing-room missionary meeting where the Bishop of Port Agnes and some of his clergy were to speak, she had declined at once; she seemed to shun anyone who came from Africa, it was as though her one desire was never to be reminded of that continent.

"Well," thought the honest fellow who loved her, "she would be safe enough here, and High Cliff Lodge is a pretty little homestead. If it wasn't for poor Barbara's extraordinary prejudice against Mrs. Jocelyn I should have no fears for Olive, but if her chaperon really is Lang's sister she ought to be warned, everyone said the sister was the worst of the two. I think I must try and get an introduction to the widow."

This was easy enough, in a day or two Lady Fellowes wanted to send a message to Olive and Percy volunteered to take it. He found the three ladies in the garden. Olive Durant lying back in a low wicker lounge, Alice busy with her embroidery, and Mrs. Jocelyn reading the newspaper, apparently a peaceful, contented little group, but

a glance showed him that Olive was paler than she had been while staying at the Towers, and he noticed that Alice watched her cousin with an anxious affection as though not satisfied with her tired, languid expression and restless bright eyes.

"I am my mother's ambassador, Miss Durant," said Percy, when he had been introduced to the chaperon, and remarked that her eyes did not meet his in a frank unembarrassed glance, "she wants to know which day you will all come over to lunch?"

Lady Fellowes had specially included the widow in the invitation, but Mrs. Jocelyn with graceful tact excused herself; she said she should be happy to see the Towers at some future time, but she thought on this first visit the cousins had better go alone.

"And then Miss Durant can drive over in the little pony carriage," she said, as though that settled it.

"But won't you be dull here alone?" asked Alice kindly.

"I am used to being alone, don't trouble your head about me, I shall be busy writing letters," was the chaperon's reply; then turning to Olive, "Don't you think it would be pleasant to have tea out here under the trees? Perhaps Mr. Fellowes would like a cup before he walks home; I will go and order it."

"It would be delightful," said Olive, dreamily. "But I am going indoors for some more silk," interposed Alice, "so I can tell the servants without your troubling to move, Mrs. Jocelyn."

Percy Fellowes followed Alice to the house, avowedly to give an order to his groom, who was walking the horses up and down, but when they were out of earshot of the two beneath the cedars, he turned to Alice gravely—

"You are not the least altered, I should have known you anywhere. I am so glad you have come back to High Cliff."

"And I was delighted to come. After Penge, being with Olive is like a taste of Heaven."

Their eyes met; Percy Fellowes said not a single word, but in that one expressive glance

unknown even to himself, his secret passed into Alice Melville's keeping.

"Do you like Mrs. Jocelyn?" he asked suddenly as they went into the house through the quaint rustic porch.

She hesitated.

"We have only known her a fortnight; I think she is very fascinating."

"That's not like you, Alice; you used to be the most downright young person in your opinions, and have strong likes and dislikes."

"I have now," she answered quietly.

"Well, then, answer my question."

"I thought at first I liked Mrs. Jocelyn very much," said the girl in a very low voice; "but since we have been here I am not sure."

"Why?"

"I can't put it into words; she is all honey and sweetness to Olive, and she is civil enough to me, but once or twice when I have looked at her suddenly, I have caught a look in her eyes that almost frightened me, it was so full of anger."

"Anger—against whom?"

"I don't know! I think she hates being poor very much. She is always telling Olive how bitter poverty is, and how different her life was before her husband's death. Olive is as generous as she can be, and I think Mrs. Jocelyn trades on her pity."

Fellowes looked perplexed.

"Miss Durant is so rich that it won't do much harm if Mrs. Jocelyn gets a sort of second salary out of her in presents; but, Alice, I don't like her."

Alice Melville started.

"Who—Mrs. Jocelyn?"

"Yes. Her eyes can't meet mine; you notice when we go back she cannot look me in the face. And your cousin is a very great heiress, with no very near relations or close friends; don't you understand, Alice, if ever there was a lonely creature upon this earth, it is Olive Durant."

"But what is it you fear?"

"I can't tell you, I don't know myself, only Barbara took a dislike to Mrs. Jocelyn, and it is so rare for her to say an unkind word of anyone it made me uneasy, and I came over to see for myself. I suppose you had references and all that sort of thing with the widow or—did Mrs. Wyndham choose her?"

"There were references I believe. Aunt Grace advertised; she picked Mrs. Jocelyn out as soon as she saw her as just the right person, but I don't think she knew her before she answered the advertisement."

"We must go back," said Percy. "I can't explain it to you, Alice, but I don't feel easy."

"What is it you fear?" asked the girl, anxiously, "only tell me that."

"But I can't. Miss Durant is alone in the world. The Wyndhams (whom I suppose are her nearest relations) are unscrupulous worldly people. If she died without making a will they would come in for a very considerable fortune. I shouldn't like to think of her as alone with anyone who was a creature of theirs."

"I shall never leave her while she wants me," said Alice; "and I believe that she would tell me anything Mrs. Jocelyn did or said that troubled her."

"You have been gone long enough to match every shade in your embroidery," said Olive, with a smile, as Alice came slowly back across the lawn. "What have you done with Mr. Fellowes?"

"I left him talking to his groom. Tea will be out directly. Olive, you look tired to death."

"I am lazy, I believe," said Olive. "I ought not to feel the English summer after spending all my life in Africa. Ah, here comes Mr. Fellowes."

Mrs. Jocelyn contributed very little to the conversation during tea. She shook hands with Percy on his departure, and expressed her thanks very prettily for having been included in Lady Fellowes' kind invitation.

Percy went home in a very perplexed state of mind. Was Mrs. Jocelyn what she seemed, a

pretty young widow forced by adverse circumstances to earn her bread or was Barbara's strange fancy right, and Miss Durant's chaperon the sister of Robert Lang, a woman whose past history was so disgraceful that never even in the days when he was all powerful with his patron had the secretary dared to introduce her at the Towers?

Percy gave his mother the answer to her invitation. Barbara gave a sigh of relief as she heard the chaperon was not coming.

"I am sorry," said Lady Fellowes. "I was very much taken with Mrs. Jocelyn."

"I saw nothing of her in church," said Sir George, "her veil was so thick you could not tell what sort of a face was behind it. What a sad it is women bundling themselves up like that in summer. I shouldn't have wondered if she'd fainted for want of air."

An unusual silence fell on the father and son when they were left alone over their wine. It was Sir George who broke it.

"I expect the way I have encumbered the property may make you think I've forfeited all right to influence your future, Percy; but there's one thing I'm going to say. You'll be thrown a good deal with the people at High Cliff Lodge. I dare say Alice Melville is a pretty girl. I know she was an uncommonly pretty child. If you fall in love with her it will be just madness."

Percy smiled cheerfully, he could forgive the fear because he knew how causeless it was.

"I'm not going to, sir. I think Armitage would be a suitable match for her. She's a dear little thing, but I'm not a marrying man."

"Do you mean it, Percy?"

"I do most honestly, sir. Save for the fury of Miss Penelope, I think the vicar would be a very sensible man if he transplanted Alice back to her old home."

"That was not what I meant. Are you in earnest in saying you are not a marrying man?"

"Yes—quite."

Sir George sighed.

"I've done you harm enough; more than you know of, Percy. Perhaps I'd better make a clean breast of it to you. You'll see then that you must marry and marry money."

"I think I know the worst, sir. Fifteen thousand pounds is the extent of the mortgage, and you are paying back the principal by instalments."

Sir George shook his head.

"I am paying the interest—the original debt is untouched. It's a strange thing, Percy, I think sometimes I must be growing deaf. From time to time cheques of mine of which I have not the faintest recollection, are presented at the bank and paid."

Percy looked bewildered.

"Do you mean that they are forgeries?"

"No. I would swear to the signature as my own, but I have not the slightest recollection of signing them, or of the names of the persons to whom they are made payable."

"But surely you could warn the bank they are not to be cashed?"

"How can I," cried poor Sir George, helplessly, "when I have no idea they are to be presented? I might leave off keeping a banking account; nothing else will stop it."

"But—do you mean that at any time these cheques are liable to appear?"

"I mean just that, Percy. Out of every cheque-book I receive, at least one cheque is sure to be appropriated to a purpose I can't recall. Sometimes I get a notice from the bank I have 'overdrawn'—I had one last week. I looked at my pass-book and found, 'Messrs. Tompkins, four hundred pounds'; well, not only could I have sworn to my own signature, but I found in my cheque-book the entry of the amount. There must be witchcraft or magic in it, Percy, for in my sober waking moments I never had any dealings with anyone called Tompkins."

The ice once broken, Sir George went on to explain that this strange thing had occurred at irregular intervals ever since Robert Lang's disgrace and exposure.

"Sometimes six months will pass without one of these bogus cheques cropping up, and I'll

begin to think I'm safe; then, lo and behold, it happens again. Taken altogether these unknown creditors have had nine hundred pounds out of me in the last year; and I see no way of stopping it, for if I told my bankers what I've told you, they'd say I was only fit for a lunatic asylum; when I'm paying over a thousand a year in interest on the mortgages I can't stand this awful mysterious drain on my income. I assure you, Percy, so far from paying off any of the principal, it's a miracle I've been able to raise the interest."

Percy Fellowes looked very grave. Sir George's confession filled him with uneasiness; not only was it quite uncertain how long this unpleasant proceeding might go on, or to what length it might increase; but it seemed to point either to something terribly wrong in his father's mental condition; or to their having a secret enemy actually on their threshold, for there was no manner of doubt the cheques were signed and drawn at the Towers; an enemy, too, who had access to the Baronet's locked-up drawers, and whose forgeries were so clever as to deceive even their victim.

Quickly Percy ran over mentally all the inmates of the household who had been with them two years and a half—the time at which Sir George first made his strange discovery—and tried to think which of them could be guilty, but it was in vain.

The Fellowes were an old-fashioned family and rarely changed their servants; there was no one at present in their employ who had not been with them ten years and proved their fidelity again and again, except three of the younger maids; and as they had not been at High Cliff more than a year, and their handwriting was of the most ordinary uncultured description, their innocence was plain. There was only the other theory to fall back on—Sir George's state of health.

"I'm not a lunatic," said the old man, indignantly; "I grant you I acted like one in my infatuation for Robert Lang, but I'm as sane now as you are."

"I know," said Percy, affectionately, "but there is no doubt Lang's conduct was a terrible shock to you, and must have thoroughly upset your nervous system."

He felt the fallacy of the argument, even as he spoke, poor fellow! for Sir George had an iron constitution, and was the hardest rider, the straightest shot for miles.

"Well," said the old man, gloomily; "go on."

"There are such things as lapses of memory," hazarded Percy. "You may have written these cheques in one of them."

"Indeed," said Sir George, drily. "Did I go and cash them at the bank in a lapse of memory, and if so what became of the money, and why did I make the cheques payable to Messrs. Tompkins, Edwards, Smith, Brown, and Jones, people I never had any dealings with so my waking knowledge. Why did I never favour the same persons twice. Oh, hang it all, Percy, if you choose to shut me up in a mad house you must; but I'm as sane as you are."

"I know," said Percy, soothingly; "but brooding over this mystery will make you ill. I wish very much, as a favour to myself, you would see Harley, and tell him the whole thing. He is an old friend, and I would answer for his silence."

"I don't mind Harley; but," with a shudder, "he must come alone. If I saw two doctors I should think you had sent for them to sign a certificate I was mad."

"You wrong me, father," said Percy, sadly, "you do indeed."

"Perhaps I do," admitted the old man; "but I've brooded over this till there've been times when I fancied myself I was going out of my mind—nothing else seemed to explain things—the fear of it has driven me nearly frantic; but for this dread I should have made a clean breast of it to you long ago, for you have a clear head, Percy, and a sound judgment."

Perhaps so, but for all that the heir of High Cliff Towers could find no elucidation of the mystery which so distressed his father.



## CHAPTER IX.

THE REV. NOEL ARMITAGE was a very industrious clergyman. He visited all his flock without partiality. He had made Olive Durant's acquaintance when she was the Fellowes' guest, and had gravely apologised to her for his sister's lack of hospitality.

Now that she had taken a house at High Cliff, and become for a time one of his parishioners, he decided to call on her, and asked Miss Penelope to accompany him.

The old maid groaned. She had mentally (as Percy Fellowes predicted) marked High Cliff Lodge with a very black cross indeed, for did it not contain three sources of peril for her beloved Noel.

She hardly knew which she feared most. Young widows were proverbially dangerous. Then Olive Durant she knew to be very beautiful, while Alice Melville had a special interest for the Vicar as the child of his predecessor, whose virtues he heard praised on every side.

"Do you think it's necessary, Noel?" remonstrated Miss Penelope; "you've seen Miss Durant already, and she probably won't be here long."

"I should call if she only intended to stay three months," said Mr. Armitage; "but, of course, I can go alone if you won't accompany me."

But this was not to be thought of for a moment. Perhaps Penelope felt she might at least prevent dangerous *idé à tête*, so she put on her snuff-coloured bonnet, and pronounced herself ready to start.

It was rather unfortunate that the Armitages selected the very afternoon when Olive and her cousin were spending at the Towers.

"Miss Durant was out," the servant said in reply to their inquiries, "Miss Melville also; but Mrs. Jocelyn was at home."

"We may as well see her," said Miss Penelope, in a resigned tone, "as we have come so far."

They were ushered into the drawing-room; but to their great surprise the widow was not alone. A gentlemanly man, with a swarthy complexion and a heavy black beard, was seated by the window in earnest conversation with her.

She introduced him at once as Mr. Morton, a great friend of her poor husband's, who, chancing to be in the neighbourhood, had made a detour to come and see her; and then with a tact which quite won Miss Penelope's heart, Mrs. Jocelyn left the two gentlemen to talk to each other, and devoted her attention solely to her lady visitor.

"It is so unfortunate," Mabel said, in her soft silky voice, "that Mr. Morton should come to-day, when Miss Durant and her cousin are both out. I fear my employer will think I have taken advantage of her absence to entertain my own friends; but, indeed," and she gave the spinster a pitiful smile, "when I got up this morning I should have said I hadn't a friend in Yorkshire; and, indeed, it is a pleasure to see someone who knew my dear Edgar."

Miss Penelope's heart was melted. Barring that extreme anxiety to keep her brother from the snares of matrimony, she was really a kindly-disposed woman.

"It must be a treat," she said sympathetically; "I am only sorry we have disturbed you."

"Pray do not say so, I am so glad to see you. When Miss Durant is at home, naturally she engages all visitors, a companion and chaperon is nobody, you know."

"Young girls are often very unfeeling," agreed Miss Penelope, "but I have heard golden opinions of Miss Durant at the Towers; the Fellowes family all admire her so."

"Ah!" Mrs. Jocelyn shook her head; "I am afraid they are rather worldly, and no doubt her wealth is a great attraction to them. You know she is enormously rich, I am afraid to say how much money she has, but it is something fabulous."

"And Percy Fellowes must marry money," said Miss Penelope, "we all know that."

"I should be sorry to think of his marrying Miss Durant," said the companion; "she is not the sort of girl to make a man happy, a dreamy, listless creature who never seems to rouse herself to interest in anything, she will sit for hour

with a book in her hand without ever turning a single page."

"It must be very dull for you," said Miss Penelope, "unless her cousin is more agreeable."

"I like Alice Melville very much," said Mabel, who certainly did not show this liking to its object, "she is so bright and unselfish; it seems hard on her, doesn't it, that she should be penniless while her cousin has such an enormous fortune."

Mr. Morton here turned to Mrs. Jocelyn with a question as to the distance to the railway station, and a doubt about the trains, and Noel Armitage, who was a most hospitable man, and who felt very much attracted by the handsome stranger, at once offered Mr. Morton a bed if he would like to remain the night at High Cliff so as to enjoy more of his old friend's company.

"A thousand thanks," said Morton, warmly, "but I am bound to get back to my hotel to-night; I am only making a sketching tour, but I may turn aside again to see more of this beautiful country; in that case perhaps I may be allowed to call on you."

A very kindly invitation was given him to do so, and then the brother and sister took their leave.

"I don't like that woman," said Noel emphatically, when they were outside the gates of High Cliff Lodge.

Usually such a sentiment would have pleased Miss Penelope, but she herself had been very much taken with the young widow, so she objected to the sharp contradiction to her own opinion.

"I thought her charming."

"It was bad form to run down Miss Durant when she eats her bread," said Noel who had listened more closely to Mrs. Jocelyn's conversation than she expected.

"One woman can't be bound to admire another, just because she pays her a salary," snapped Penelope.

"No, but I have heard a great deal of Olive Durant, and I am certain she is the last person in the world to be proud and overbearing. I rather fancy that little widow wanted to make out a doleful story to attract your pity."

"We may as well go on to the Towers as we are so far on the way," said Penelope. "Lady Fellowes will give us some tea; I wonder Mrs. Jocelyn didn't offer it, but I suppose, poor thing, she is not allowed to."

"Rubbish, dear; I should say she had a remarkably good time of it, trust a widow to get her own way and not be kept under by two young girls."

They found the family at the Towers in the beautiful shady drawing-room. Sir George was out, Percy, who professed to have a great dread of Miss Penelope, devoted himself to Alice Melville, the vicar and Barbara relapsed into parish talk. Olive found herself talking to Miss Armitage, and not finding her so very formidable after all.

"We have just been to call on you," said Penelope; "what a nice woman your companion is."

"I'm glad you went in," said Olive. "I was afraid Mrs. Jocelyn would have a long lonely day, we couldn't persuade her to come here with us."

"She had a visitor, an old friend of her husband's passing within a few miles of High Cliff came over to call. My brother took a great fancy to Mr. Morton, and has asked him to come and see us at some future time."

"He was a very nice fellow," put in Noel, "he's not a clergyman, but he's done a great deal of lay missionary work abroad. I should think you would find him an interesting acquaintance, Miss Durant, since he told me he had spent the last three years in South Africa. Perhaps you have met him, for he said he had visited Port Agnes."

"I do not recall the name," said Olive, and then to the dismay of everyone but Penelope, who put it down to affectation, the beautiful heiress fainted away! Barbara and her brother took the visitors into another room, while Alice and Lady Fellowes did their best to restore Olive.

"What made her faint?" asked the elder lady, anxiously. "I thought when I first saw her to-day, she looked very white and fragile. Has she been ill lately?"

Alice shook her head.

"She never complains. I think sometimes she must be fretting about her father."

Lady Fellowes shook her head.

"You loved your father very dearly, Ally, but you did not fret yourself ill when he died. I think, poor Olive must have some other trouble. When she was ill here I believed there was something on her mind."

"I know of nothing," said Alice, "but I think she fainted because the very mention of South Africa always upsets her. She can't bear anyone to speak about it."

"Hush, she is coming to, now," said Lady Fellowes, gently.

And it was true. The beautiful dark eyes opened slowly, but Olive's soul must have lingered still on the borderland of unconsciousness. She did not seem even to see the kind faces bent over her, and her first words filled the watchers with dismay.

"Is my punishment never to end. Oh, dad, can't you help me to blot it out?" The words died away in a sort of moan; another moment and her eyes fixed themselves on Alice. Memory had returned, and she put one trembling hand on her cousin's. "Did I frighten you, Ally; I am sorry."

"You frightened us all," said Lady Fellowes. "You've sent the vicar and Miss Penelope away in alarm. It will be all over High Cliff to-morrow, Olive, that you are a most affected, sentimental young lady. Miss Penelope is so strong minded herself she holds fainting in high contempt."

"I'm very sorry, please forgive me!"

Lady Fellowes bent and kissed her.

"Only look a little stronger, Olive, and I'll forgive you anything. Now we'll go into the other room, or Penelope will have driven Percy frantic, she is one of his pet antipathies."

Tea was waiting for them, and under its influence Olive revived. She talked very cheerfully to Miss Armitage, and so mollified that spinster as to induce her to remark no doubt after such an illness as Miss Durant's the hot weather must be very trying, which meant she had forgiven her fainting fit.

"Well," said Lady Fellowes, when Noel and his sister had departed, "I always pity Mr. Armitage. I think a month with Penelope would drive me frantic, and he has stood nearly thirty years of her company."

"And may have to stand thirty more," said Percy; "but the person I pity most is Mrs. Noel should that lady ever presume to exist. My word, Miss Pen would scratch her eyes out."

"Is Mr. Armitage engaged?" asked Alice.

"Not a bit of it. He'll never be allowed to think of such a thing," said Percy.

"I wish you wouldn't speak of him as if he were a child," said Olive. "Do you know I rather like him."

"If Miss Penelope could hear you" breathed Percy. "Well, Miss Durant, the vicar is a good fellow, and so I'll try and speak of him respectfully, and forget he's under petticoat government."

"Which reminds me," said Alice, smiling, "that Olive and I are under that same."

"What, Miss Penelope's government?"

"No, Mrs. Jocelyn's, and we promised to be home by seven o'clock; Olive, if you feel well enough I think we ought to be starting."

"I am ready," said Olive; "but I don't think I can drive, I feel so shaky."

"And I never had the honour of conducting anything nobler than a donkey, so what is to be done?" asked Alice.

"If you don't mind putting up with the tiny seat at the back, and imagining you are safe and comfortable, I shall be proud to drive you both home," said Percy. "I can get back through the wood in plenty of time for dinner."

"I have a better scheme still," said Lady Fellowes, "stay here for the night, and I will send word to Mrs. Jocelyn."

But Percy's proposal was finally adopted, Alice squeezed herself into the tiger's seat behind, and Mr. Fellowes drove with Olive at his side, looking so white and fragile that his very heart ached for her.

What did it all mean? What was the secret

she guarded so jealously? What association had her childhood's home for her so painful that the very mention of the place overcame her?

"I hope," said Alice, craning her neck forward to talk to the other two, "that Mrs. Jocelyn's visitor has departed; I'm sure you're not well enough to see a stranger, Olive."

"I think I shall go straight to bed," said Olive, "I feel used up; you must be extra amiable to Mr. Morton if he's still there, Ally, to make up for my rudeness."

"Surely Mrs. Jocelyn would not presume to invite a strange man to dinner," said Percy, gravely.

"I don't know," said Alice; "she makes herself at home, doesn't she, Olive?"

"I want her to feel at home," said Olive gravely; "she has had a great deal of trouble for one so young, and I am sorry for her."

"You are too angelic, Olive," said her cousin. "Now Mrs. Jocelyn's well enough for a chaperon, but I think she makes the most of her troubles; and as for being 'so young,' she's nearer forty than thirty."

"She's twenty-seven; she told Aunt Grace so."

"And how much more? Why she let out the other night she remembered the great exhibition, and that's nearly thirty years ago!"

"It was in sixty-two," said Percy quietly, "if she went to that even as a small child she's a good bit over thirty."

"Well, if she likes to call herself younger it doesn't hurt anyone. I wonder if Mr. Morton is an old lover of hers come back to marry her now she's free!"

This time Miss Durant spoke the stranger's name without the least emotion.

"Oh, no," said Alice; "the vicar said he'd been sort of lay-missionary, and I couldn't for my life imagine Mrs. Jocelyn marrying a missionary. Serious books bore her to death, and though she went to church with us last Sunday, she told me she couldn't possibly go regularly, because she found the service so fatiguing. If any devoted suitor robs us of our chaperon it won't be a missionary, lay or clerical."

"They were at the Lodge by now; Mrs. Jocelyn came to the gate to meet them alone."

"What have you done with your visitor?" asked Alice, cheerfully.

"Sent the poor old man back to his hotel to write down his impressions of High Cliff for an archaeological society," replied the widow, quickly, "he's learned in such matters. I hope, Miss Durant, you did not mind his coming; I have known him ever since I was a child, he was like a second father to me till I married."

Olive said kindly she was glad Mrs. Jocelyn had seen her friend, but the effect on the other two listeners was magical; a look of distrust flashed out of Percy's eyes, and was met by an answering glance from Alice Melville's; both Mr. Armitage and Miss Penelope had implied that Mr. Morton was "young," young is an elastic word but certainly would not describe correctly a contemporary of Mrs. Jocelyn's parents.

Who had made the mistake—the widow or the Armitages? and if the former what was her object?

Percy Fellowes ruminated on this as he walked swiftly home, and felt decidedly uneasy; he would have been considerably more so could he have seen Mrs. Jocelyn's visitor at that present moment.

"Mr. Morton" was in the act of taking off his heavy black beard and whiskers; he surveyed his face, when destitute of these hirsute adornments with great satisfaction.

"Gad," he said as he locked them up in a black travelling bag, "what a guy I did look! I really think I could have faced Sir George himself, the disguise was so admirable."

(To be continued.)

It is said of the fur seal of Alaska that there is no known animal on land or water which can take higher physical rank, or which exhibits a higher order of instinct.

## LADY RAVENHILL'S SECRET.

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### CHAPTER XXXVII.—(continued.)

"SAID he to me, 'Daniel, you'll want all your wits with that brute that he does not break out, so I think it right to warn you. Once he gets out he stops at nothing!' 'And what does nothing mean?' I asked quite grave like. 'It means,' said he, 'killing the first person he meets, and the second and the third. I tell you this in private, like,' slipping a sovereign into my hand. 'Mums the word. I got him for four-pound ten and his travelling expenses. He cost two hundred and fifty bringing him from Borneo. He got out once,' says he, lowering his voice to a whisper, 'and killed a girl. He hates women kind special, and that was how they were glad to get rid of him, anyhow. The authorities thought he was drowned in the Seine, but he's not—he's to the good yet.' 'To the bad it were more likely,' said I, little guessing how soon my words would come true."

"In time we came into my own part of the world, and Rosie was home. She wouldn't hardly look at me, and were very down on me all along of drink and the menagerie, and she didn't look a bit too happy herself, and I told her so, and we had high words. I said, 'better have married me, than a scamp of a gentleman,' and I drank, and drank, and drank, worse than anyone in all their born days!—always at night, but the craving was in me in the day, too; and one evening I was not myself, and I forgot to draw the bars of that fiend's cage; or rather, I drew them and did not slip them home. This were about five o'clock, and then I went and had a snooze, and slept it off that time. At night one of us always went round to see all were square, and it were my night, I went round about twelve pretty sober, and I were sobered altogether to see the baboon's cage open and empty."

"I knew he'd do harm, and I knew I'd lose my place, and I felt half mad as I tore out after him. It were a lightish night, and I traced his ugly mark in the snow here and there over hedges, fields, looking in at cottage windows, and at last it went clean into a wood, but it was too dark to track him. But I had not gone far when the piercing screams I presently heard from Rosie's cottage made me run as I never ran before. They stopped quite sudden as I came up and tried to burst in the door with all my strength—it was no use."

"It was fast top and bottom, and I rushed to the window. Shall my eyes ever forget the awful sight they saw! It were certainly all over—I was just too late! The room was upside down, as it were, and pools of blood on the floor, and I saw a woman's body, as it were, lying in the passage and it did not stir. The child in the cradle was stone dead, her very bird in the cage was dead, and in the middle of all this stood the fiend, tearing up a pillow out of a cradle with his teeth, and scattering rage and feathers anyhow. He heard me, he saw my face at the window, and he gave a screech of rage and fear and fled into a back room, and two minutes later I saw his hideous body struggling out of the top of one of the chimneys."

"I seized up a big stone I felt like a madman—I had the courage of ten—and clove his skull with it as he scrambled down, but these benats take a deal of killing, and he were four times as strong as me, but I had the strength that night of ten men! What with fury and grief, and despair, we grappled together, that brute and me, to and fro, backwards and forwards, here and there. I swore to myself I would kill him then or die. He tried to get his great big hands round my throat, and thrumme my life out as he had hers, but I was too many for him. I flung him down, I knelt on him, and with a pocket-knife I stabbed him to the heart. He gave just one fiendish, wild kind of yell and stiffened out with one quiver stone dead."

"Then I dragged his cursed carcase to an old limekiln and flung him in, and covered him with stones, and there he is, if anyone likes to look for him. I knew that all was over in the cottage, that she was dead, and I felt kind of crazy."

"I started away the same night with the snow

falling fast, and covering my footsteps, and walked twenty-five miles before morning. It seemed to me as if I had murdered her, and, any way, I was very queer in my head."

"I took the train to Liverpool, and went on board a Dublin cattle boat, and when I landed at the North Wall, I was taken up as a lunatic, and mad I was for months in the county asylum with heaps of other lunatics. I believed, I was full sure I was a monkey and nothing else."

"In the end I got my reason, and after that, I worked my way back to England, and took odd jobs about the country, and went on the drink again desperate."

"I never told a soul of what was eating my very life away, for I always dreaded they would disbelieve the story about the baboon, and think it was *myself*, for I had no witness; and clearing out that night, and my being her rejected lover once, and having had words with her lately, all looked black for me."

"I was sharp enough to see this, and I didn't want to have nothing to say to Marwood, so I kept my secret till now; and now I'm going, everybody in the place is welcome to know it, and believe it or not as they please, for ere this paper is read I shall be in another world."

("Signed) JOSEPH DANIEL."

Below came the names of two witnesses.

"Now is not that a most extraordinary statement?" demanded the doctor, folding up the paper impressively, and gazing over his spectacles at the young couple in front of him. "In all my professional experience I never came across anything like it; and its quite conceivable—the extraordinary finger-marks on the poor woman's throat, the mysterious entrance and exit of the criminal, are all accounted for, are they not?"

"Yes," replied Hugh, faintly, "but it is even a more frightful clearing up than I anticipated, and—I'll just go in, I feel rather faint. I can't sit up any longer," rising as he spoke, and slowly leaving the summer-house, more ghostly, if possible, than he had entered it. Once back in his own sitting-room, and alone with Nellie, he said, as he leant back in an armchair with closed eyes, "It was probably the night of her counting the money in the candlelight that attracted the brute—money I took her to get her out of the country to join Carew."

"But why at night, dear Hugh?" "Because of the Carews, and to keep the matter as quiet as possible. Dicky Carew particularly wished that the whole thing, marriage and all, should be kept from his people. They knew she went away with him, but they never guessed she was his wife. If his father had known the truth, he would have cut him out of his will, and Dicky could not afford that."

"It's quite the most terrible story, I ever heard of; as a tragedy unique," said Eleanor, with pale cheeks, and eyes which still reflected the feelings of horror which the confession had stirred up in her mind. "And now, Hugh, that you are thoroughly cleared, you must tell me how I am to get my diamonds back from Mr. Isachar?"

"Why, what do you mean?" he asked in amazement, and the whole history of Mr. Digby and Mr. Isachar was speedily run over—a history he listened to with many exclamations and half-smothered imprecations. When it came to an end there was a long pause, and Eleanor said at last, "You are not very angry, with me, are you, Hugh?" coming close to him, and looking up into his face.

"Angry, no! How could I be when you were pawing your jewels and all your fortune, as you imagined, to save me, you little, obstinate unbelieveing goose! But I shall make Mr. Isachar disgorge his prey, and that soon. He and I are old acquaintances; and as to that scoundrel Digby, he had better move on from my immediate neighbourhood, or he will find the place a good deal too hot to hold him. The rascal! the ruffian! to make you his tool, his cat's-paw, to thrust Freddy Firstflight on you, besides levying such blackmail!"

"Well, well, never mind, dear!" said his wife, soothingly. "You have been hearing so many exciting things to-day, put Mr. Digby out of your head at present, and I'll make tea, and we



will talk of our trip to Italy instead. We have had quite enough disagreeable topics for some time. I am going to take old Hester Hitchins. She was abroad with me before, and is most useful, though you would think she would be quite as much at home on the Continent as a swan on a turnpike road!"

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

AND now, Lord Ravenhill having been pronounced fit to travel, was preparing to take his departure from the little village where he had been a sojourner for so long against his will. Handsome presents, besides liberal—even magnificent—payment, were made to the Bonner family.

Mrs. Murray's services were rewarded in a way that made her open her eyes very wide. The tramp, Joe Daniel, had had a respectable funeral—a hearse and two black horses, a mourning coach—all the way from the country town; and a plain tombstone indicated, above his grave, that Joseph Daniel, late of the parish of Blackmore, rested there, aged five-and-thirty years.

The evening before Mrs. Bonner's guests took their departure a note was put into Lord Ravenhill's hand.

"It came from the Barley Mow Inn," said the messenger; "from the other lord," and it ran as follows, in a very shaky, almost illegible, hand:—

"Come and see me before you go."

"F. F."

"No time like the present," said Hugh to himself, as he turned and twisted the billet in his hand. "But what the deuce can he want with me! I should think I was just about the last person he cared to see. Queer thing we should be in the same smash, and both running a race, as it were, who'd die first! But by all accounts he is not out of the wood yet! I'll just slip out, and say nothing to Nell," he added, reflectively; and taking his hat and a stout walking-stick he made his way down into the village, a long and most venturesome walk for him alone.

The children stared at the strange gentleman who was so nearly killed by all accounts, and here he was, not looking too bad, they said to themselves as he went up the steps of the Barley Mow, and sent in his name.

He had not long to wait before he was conducted upstairs, and ushered into Lord Firstflight's presence. But could it be Freddy, he asked himself incredulously, as he walked over towards a bent figure in a big chair at the other end of the room—an old, bowed down man, with a scarred face and a long, ragged-looking beard? Now he, at his worst, had always been shaved by the careful Mrs. Murray.

"I see you don't believe your eyes, Ravenhill, and can't make out who it is, but it really is all that's left of me," said a feeble voice. "It's awfully good of you to come and see me, and I'm glad you have got off so well, only you are thin, and don't look up to much. You've nothing to complain of."

"A broken arm and head, and ribs, if you call that nothing!" said the other, drawing up a chair, and resolving to bury his animosity against this miserable, unfortunate cripple. "It would be like striking a woman," he said to himself, "to give him the shaking he deserves!"

"I'm sorry to see you like this, Firstflight," he observed, after a pause.

"Aye, I'm in a bad way, and I'll never be much better."

"Oh, come!—nonsense!" said the other, cheerfully. "I thought the same of myself at the time, and look at me now! We have youth on our side."

"Yes, but I've led such a racking life, that tells now; and, besides that, my spine is injured. I'll hardly be able to walk again! Fancy ending my days in a Bath-chair. And look at my face—an eye half closed, my chin cleft in two! Who

would ever believe, to look at me, that I ever went by the name of good-looking Freddy, or fascinating Freddy?"

"Who, indeed?" his companion asked himself.

"But it's not to talk of all my ailments I've sent for you, Ravenhill, as you may imagine," said the other with an effort. "It is to make you an humble apology, and to ask your and your wife's forgiveness. I behaved like a blackguard to her. I've often thought of it as I've been lying there"—nodding at the bed—"but indeed my life has not been a very pleasant one to look back upon! I've been a bad lot. However, now I'm going to try and turn over a new leaf in earnest. Virtue, they say, is an absence of temptation, and I'm not likely to be tempted now I'm a miserable wreck. People will declare it's very easy to talk of reformation now, and that the old rhyme will apply to the case. You know it, I warrant,—

'When the devil was ill, the devil a saint would be,  
When the devil was well, the devil a saint was he!'

But I'm in earnest; and the first step on the new road is to ask your forgiveness for the way I behaved to your wife. I'm afraid her pardon is more than I dare to expect."

"What did you do?" said his visitor, bluntly. "How came you to inveigle her into the wrong train?"

"Aye! How came I to do lots of things," said the other, drily. "I admired Lady Ravenhill, and got old Digby, a regular sweep of a fellow, to introduce me, and I laid myself out to do the agreeable; but it were no manner of good, and the more she snubbed me, the more infatuated I became. I was bent on making a conquest, and set down to the siege with the greatest deliberation. I had never known one who had not capitulated. Give me time and opportunity, and I was resolved to succeed."

"Well, well, go on," said Lord Ravenhill, sharply. "Say what you have to say, and get it over."

"I called, and called, and called, and never got in—no fear. I went to the parish church, and waited every Sunday, and had a word or two with her in the porch. I sent her flowers—I dare not yet write. In the end I resolved to carry the fortress by a *coup de main*. I believed that she cared for no one, and would learn to appreciate me once I had carried her off."

"Yes, yes," assented Lord Ravenhill, impatiently.

"I was sure you did not care a brass button for her, and it seemed to me a sin to leave such a rose in the desert to bluish unseen."

"How did you know I did not care for her?" demanded his companion, with a sudden, quick look of interrogation, and digging his stick viciously into the carpet as he spoke.

"Pooh! Man alive, every one could see it," said the other, brusquely. "Did you not deliberately ignore each other on all occasions?"

Here Lord Ravenhill made a gesture of annoyed impatience, and said,—

"Well, well, well. You were all quite out for once in your lives. Get on."

"Get on, do you say? Well I will. I got the tip from Digby that she was in town on business, and sure to be returning by such and such a train, and a nod was as good as a wink."

"I was there on the platform. I conducted her to the carriage, and, in the innocence of her heart, being ten minutes early she found herself in the Portsmouth express, imagining all the time that she was going home."

"After a while she began to guess at something queer—the country was different—the stations."

"I soothed her down for a bit, and then I began to feel my way, and to be a little more plain-spoken, and after a bit I told her the truth; and, by George! she was like a wild cat."

"She flew to the door, and would have thought very little of flinging herself out on the permanent way."

"I can't tell you all she said to me, but I saw that it was 'no go,' and just as luck would have it, you came upon the scene at the next station. Your face was a study, that I will say—and then I hooked it!"

"It certainly looked uncommonly fleshy to you, and I wanted to clear her if she had not managed to do that herself, and to ask you to tell her how desperately sorry I am."

"Only you think I'm dying, I know you, Ravenhill, would never have come here and given me your hand."

"I expect this visit to me went terribly against the grain, but now I'm going to reform. I know you're not the chap to turn your back on me, but will give me a hand out of this slough of despond."

"You have everything now," he added, tremulously, "and can afford to be generous. Your health is likely to be restored; you have the use of your limbs; you and she have made it up by all accounts, so you may as well say something to me before you go. Any crumb of comfort will do."

"Yes, I will," said the other, rising. "It is not for me to be down upon another; and as far as I'm concerned, you have free forgiveness, and mind you, it's not every man would give it to you, after attempting what you did!" he added, significantly. "And now we will never mention the subject again; let us bury it and the hatchet together. Good-bye!"—putting out his hand—"I hope you will soon pull round; and I hope"—impressively—"that you will keep to all your good resolutions, and not give scoffers occasion to quote that little bit of poetry you repeated to me just now."

So saying, he put on his hat, and with a farewell nod to the cripple in the arm-chair, walked out of the room.

Next day Lord and Lady Ravenhill left for Southampton, where they went on board the *Constantia*, en route for the Mediterranean and Levant.

Miss Fortescue's wedding took place just about this time, and they were of course unavoidably absent, but they sent as their substitute, a most magnificent present, and placed Blackmore at the disposal of the happy couple.

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

A YEAR has passed since the Ravenhills have gone abroad, and not very long ago there were great rejoicings at Blackmore on the birth of an heir to the name and estates.

Tar barrels, bonfires, a tenants' dinner, and a tenants' ball; but Lord and Lady Ravenhill have only returned to England during the last few weeks, and it being June, and the height of the season, have established themselves in one of those magnificent mansions at the corner of Belgrave square.

Lady Ravenhill has been to the drawing-room, and the same evening appeared in her opera box in all the glories of her diamonds (long since wrested from Mr. Isachar) and her court dress.

She looks lovely, and many eyes and opera-glasses are turned upon her as she and Mary sit in the front of the box, and in their turn criticise their surroundings, and laugh and whisper together.

"Is that Ravenhill's mysterious wife?" said one dandy to another in the stalls. "Uncommonly pretty she is, too! I don't see any one to beat her in looks in the house. He was always a fellow with an eye for a pretty woman and a good horse, but he'd better keep his optic on her, for she has somebody in the back of the box she keeps leaving back to every now and then with no end of *empressment*. A man, I can't see his face; and there's a chap behind the other woman, too! Who are they—can you see?"

"It's Ravenhill himself," said his friend, as he leant forward in answer to some appeal and looked towards the stage. "What a good-looking chap he is! Fancy him being so taken up with his own wife!" laughing. "Four or five years ago he was all for other fellows' sisters. What a change is here!"

"Well, you know," said the other, stroking his moustache, musingly, "when a man has a good-looking wife, and likes her, I can't see why he

shouldn't speak to her, and ride with her, and go to places with her. 'Pon my honour I don't! I know it's not the fashion, that married people never drive together much now-a-days, but Ravenhill never bothered himself about the fashion at any time, and won't now. They have an A 1 house in town, and no end of a good cook; and everything is done in the best form. I shall go and leave a pasteboard."

"Ah! well; I don't mind if I do too!" assented the other; and a new act now coming on, the two gentlemen's attention was attracted in another quarter.

And now, before we lower the curtain, let us look at two pictures.

The first represents a small back drawing-room in a very small house in Mayfair, a room with rose-coloured blinds, large paper Japanese fans, plants in stands, a number of little tables, a world of photographs in plush frames, chiefly of men, a sofa, and two or three quaint, stuffed chairs, two of which were drawn up to the fire, for Conny was a chilly person, and the evening or night rather, was damp.

These chairs are occupied by her and her friend—her *ainé damoiselle*, Mrs. Fort—grace widow, about as fast a little woman as breathes the air of London—fair, petite, admirably dressed, with her little face deftly painted, her little feet resting on the fender, gossiping after dinner with Conny, and telling her scandalous stories, such as her soul loved.

Conny looks old, and shrunken, and *passée*, though she has endeavoured to repair the ravages of time with the aid of art.

Her great, black eyes look fierce and hollow, and nothing will conceal the crow's feet in their neighbourhood.

"I saw your friends the Ravenshills walking in the Row this morning, Con, he looking as fit as you please, and she making quite a sensational promenade. I must say I admired her dress, white, and made something quite too deliciously well. I wonder who is her dress-maker?"

"Fine feathers make fine birds," said Conny, spitefully. "I've seen her looking like an old rag woman. They came home about tea days ago, I believe, and have brought a baby with them."

"Well, what else were they to do? You wouldn't have them leave it behind?" said the other, cheerfully.

"I don't care if they drown it as far as I'm concerned!" said Mrs. Derwent, recklessly. "I loathe the young of the human species. I suppose I'll have to go and call," drawing down the corners of her mouth, "and do the civil."

"What! To the baby?" cried Mrs. Fort, with a laugh.

"No, but the baby's mamma; and I suppose it will be paraded for my benefit—this son and heir, this treasure!"

"One would think you were the next of kin to hear you, Conny. What has this Ravenhill woman done to get into your black books?"

But, needless to remark, the answer to that question remained a secret locked up securely in Mrs. Derwent's heart. The only man she had really ever cared for was Lady Ravenhill's husband—was not that enough?

Another tableau represents an immense room in Belgrave-square—a drawing-room furnished with a rare combination of wealth and taste. Two figures near the fireplace look almost lost in its great proportions. They are the mistress of the house on a low chair in front of the fire, in a simple white dinner dress, with a painted hand-screen in her hand, and the master in evening dress standing by the mantelpiece sipping his coffee.

These two young people enjoy an evening at home, and many are the artful excuses they fabricate to get off a heavy dinner or a crowded ball, and the present is a case in point. By rights they ought to be making their bow at this moment to the Marchioness of Marbletop, instead of sitting at their own fireside.

"Now, Hugh, you've had enough coffee! Get the paper and read me the news of the day," said his wife, imperiously.

"I call this reading aloud to you a most awful plant!" he returned, laying down his cup with a smile. "You are an impostor, and have every bit as good use of your eyes as I have."

"Still, I must be careful," she replied, coolly; "and you know you like it, so get the *Times* and begin at once, or else tell me what you were doing with yourself this morning."

"Doing with myself! Well, for one thing, I was looking at a hack for you at Tattersall's. It's coming round for you to look at yourself to-morrow. I think myself she'll do, as handsome as a picture, and perfect manners."

"Manners!" she echoed, with a pout. "I don't want a well broken horse. I like one that takes some riding. I like showing off," looking at him mischievously, "especially in the Row."

"I daresay you do; but now you are a responsible person, the head of an establishment, the mother of a family. We won't mind any more showing off in or out of the Row."

"Oh! won't we! Wait till you see! I can do great things with a spur! And what is the price of this perfect beast?"

"I'm afraid to tell you!" he answered, with a laugh.

"So much!" opening her eyes very wide, and making a grimace.

"Yes, it's a stiff figure; but she is worth it to me," significantly.

"I wonder you don't get me a fat old gentleman's cob!" said Eleanor, laughing, "and a leading rein."

"That will all come in good time, when you're a fat old lady. Talking of old ladies, I saw Conny to-day," he added, abruptly.

"What!" cried Lady Ravenhill, jumping up to her feet.

"Yes, Conny, in Piccadilly! She looks as old as anything. You'd hardly know her, so withered, and pinched, and yellow."

"But no doubt she can make herself up at a pual to look sixteen," said Nellie, with a nod.

"I don't think so. She's all gone to pieces—late hours and a wearing life are telling at last. It comes with a run when it does arrive—middle age. Conny is getting on!" reflectively, pulling his moustache. "She must be near forty."

"And what did she say?" inquired his wife, airing her satin-slipped foot on the fender, and regarding it complacently.

"She said she was delighted to see me."

"That, of course?" impressively.

"And awfully glad to hear about the son and heir."

"I don't believe it, not if she went on her bended knees."

"And she said she was coming to call on you."

"No," incredulously.

"It's a fact your ladyship."

"I won't receive her, so there's a fact for your lordship."

"Nellie!"

"No, not a bit of it, Hugh; so never look at me like that. You dear, foolish old boy, did I never tell you of her last visit?"

"No, never; so say on."

"Well, my dear, just hearken to it now."

"Whatever of me is not eyes is all ears, so go on, and don't keep me on tenter-hooks. I'm trembling with curiosity."

"She came to Blackford, and found me just the first day down, after a bad cold, covering over the fire and in floods of tears."

"Tears—for what?"

"For you!" giving him a playful push; "but that's a detail we won't dwell on. And she came and made quite a long sitting, and gave me a good piece of her mind."

"A valuable present, truly."

"She said she hated me once, now she only pitied me. I was a wretched creature in every way—that she had always loved you. Did you ever hear of such audacity!" declaiming with the fan. "And that she was amply avenged since I had made you a miserable man, and we were parted for ever. Now what do you say to that?" gazing interrogatively at her companion, and nodding her head three times with great gravity.

"I never heard of anything like it, never," he returned, slowly, with his eyes fixed upon his wife. "And pray what did you do?" smiling.

"Fly at her, hustle her out of the house, or what!"

"I just sat there, and let her storm away at me, and I was goose enough to cry. Oh, I just did cry!" nodding her head again.

"Well, my little Nell, we won't have any more of her visits, and Jervais shall say, 'Not at home.' See"—pinching her ear—"what it is to have a little dragon of a jealous wife, and how I'm bullied."

"Jealous. Now, Hugh, you know you are talking nonsense—the greatest possible nonsense and rubbish. It's much more likely I shall make you jealous, and have you tearing your hair out in handfoul, than I should be jealous of you. I warn you to be on your best behaviour. After all, let her come. I can afford to be generous; and we will ask her to this big dinner party that's coming over us early next month. She will make an admirable pendant to Freddy First-flight"—looking mischievously at her husband—"but she shan't see the baby in case of the evil eye."

"Why, one would not think that an awful loss, you silly girl," said her husband. "He's not much to look at just yet—a button nose and a wisp of light hair."

"Hugh, you ought to be ashamed of yourself. How dare you. You know he is beautiful—matchless; and his nose is not a button. It's exactly like yours."

"I should be sorry to think so," said his father coolly surveying his own well-shaped feature in the chimney-glass. "He will never be as good-looking as I am"—looking slyly at his wife. "He's going to take after my father, as far as I can see."

"Now I'm not going to 'rise' to all this, as you imagine. You are just as ridiculous about the boy as I am—nay, worse. It's not so bad in a woman, but nursing a baby is unpardonable in a man. So there."

"You are quite sure you are not jealous of Conny still?" said Hugh, suddenly turning the conversation.

"I! Good gracious, why should I be—that is if you have any taste. I'm about fifteen years—well, twelve at any rate—younger than she is. I'm very pretty," gazing at herself passionately in the glass. "I've been told that my figure is perfect—not by you, sir. I'm very agreeable, accomplished, and good-tempered, and—"

"The finest young woman in London," interrupted her husband.

"No—no—no! quite the reverse. It's only to you, my second self, that I mention these little trifles, just to show you I am not ignorant of my worth. What do you think?"

"I think, my love, that like Solomon's wise woman, your price is above rubies, and that I am just the luckiest fellow in England."

The grand dinner went off with great *éclat* at (no matter what number) Belgrave-square.

Lady Ravenhill made a charming hostess; she had a fund of conversation, a score of witty sayings—and witty sayings come very aptly from the lips of a gay and pretty young woman.

The elder men guests were not a little amazed to discover that under all this outward charm there was a thick layer of scientific learning (quite unusual learning) that had been crammed into Eleanor's reluctant head in her father's time, and that had actually remained there ever since, and she found it rather useful than otherwise now!

Dinner over, the ladies adjourned upstairs, and were soon scattered about the spacious suite of rooms, looking at books, rare prints and pictures, whilst Lady Ravenhill herself undertook the task of entertaining the oldest and heaviest dowagers.

Conny's eyes roved enviously over the spacious rooms, the pretty smiling hostess; and as she looked, the gentlemen flocked in, Lord Ravenhill last.

He made his way (for she watched him) to his wife's side, and said something to her with a smile,—something for her ear alone.

"It was all first-rate, Nell; you are a pearl of hostesses."

This was what he said, but it was the manner



of it, and the look that accompanied it, that went like a dagger to Mrs. Derwent's angry heart.

Why should that woman be so happy and she cast out in the cold, with no one to care for her?

"The dinner was perfect," said a noted *bon vivant*, taking a seat beside her. "The sauce with the cutlets was something quite new! Did you taste the Baccosoles?"

"I don't know," returned Mrs. Derwent, peevishly, shrugging her shoulders. "A grand dinner in one house seems to me just the same as another—I'm no epicure!"

This was a side thrust at her companion, who felt riled, and was resolved to let her have a nasty one in return when he saw an opening.

"I never saw a better matched, better looking couple than our hosts! They seem to suit each other down to the ground—eh?" he remarked, after a short pause.

"They were not always like that," said his neighbour, triumphantly. "At one time they used to lead a regular cat and dog life; first she ran away from him, then he found her, and after a little while, left her, and then they made it up—"

"For life," put in her companion. "Better late than never; I've heard a good deal about it—one hears everything in London—there's very little we don't know. I can assure you, Mrs. Derwent," eyeing her significantly.

"There is one thing I would like to know!" she returned, impetuously. "Can you tell me how that girl, his cousin, whom he used to loathe, whom he shrank from, like the very plague, has managed to worm herself so entirely into his good graces, to establish the most unbounded influence over him, to keep him tied to her apron-strings—he that was always the greatest flirt in London, to make him worship the very ground she walks upon. How—how has she managed it?" she repeated, with passionate vehemence, looking into her companion's face with questioning, fiery black eyes.

"Ah! my dear Mrs. Derwent! that I cannot tell you. It is beyond me—a kind of thing we don't hear too much of nowadays—perfect married happiness. But I can make a suggestion if you will permit me. Why not ask Lady Ravenhill herself? No doubt she will tell you her secret!"

[THE END.]

## NORAH'S GUARDIAN.

—30—  
(Continued from page 273.)

What Rupert read in her eyes, who shall say, but a moment later his arms were round her and her head was resting on his bosom.

"Oh, Norah, my love, my darling!" he whispered, "is it really so? Am I to be happy at last after all my years of misery?"

"If I can make you so," she whispered, raising her eyes to his.

"You only can," he replied, and stooping he kissed her.

"Well, well, it is a journey from town to this place, I must admit," said Mr. Ellerslie a day or two later as Rupert Hasted met him in the great hall and welcomed him to Thurston, "but the beauty of the place makes up for the length of the journey. How is my charming young friend, Miss Desborough?" he added as Norah appeared. "Ah, the country suits her she is looking the picture of health."

"Yes; I told you, Mr. Ellerslie, I loved Cumberland," she said, laughing; "and I am looking forward to showing you all the beauties around us. I felt sure you would be pleased with the country, and you will find Thurston worth exploring."

"A most beautiful old place, I can see that. It seems to suit you too, Mr. Hasted, excuse me for remarking it, but you are looking a different person to what you did six months ago," he replied.

"And I am a different person," he laughed, gaily. "Ah! ah! that's right," chuckled Mr. Ellerslie, knowingly.

The next morning being Norah's birthday, Mr. Ellerslie proposed to transact the business about

which he had come to Thurston at eleven o'clock, if his host and his ward were willing, and at that hour the little man found himself in the library with Rupert and Norah.

He looked at Hasted inquiringly.

"I may as well tell you at once, Ellerslie," he said, "that our poor friend's wish regarding his daughter remaining at Thurston with me will be carried out. She has no wish to leave me, have you, Norah?"

And he put his hand on Norah's shoulder.

"None in the world, doctor," she replied, softly.

"Ha! Very good, very good, so far," murmured Mr. Ellerslie. "Well?"

"Well," replied Rupert, whilst a blush rose to Norah's fair cheek, "we have decided, Norah has consented, in fact, we are to be married next month, Ellerslie, and—"

"Bravo, bravo! that's right, that's right!" cried little Mr. Ellerslie, jumping up and shaking Rupert by the hand cordially, "I'm so glad, I'm very glad—never was more rejoiced in my life. Miss Norah, I congratulate you; it's just what your father would have wished, only—"

"Only what?" they both asked in dismay, as they saw his face fall.

"Only—you are a great heiress you know, my dear Miss Desborough—a hundred thousand pounds is a large sum. There will be a good deal of legal formality to be gone through before your marriage can take place. A month! Well! I'll do my best, I'll try to get things settled by then."

"A hundred thousand pounds," said Norah, "dear me! We shall be quite rich shan't we, doctor?"

"Yes, of course," said Mr. Ellerslie.

And so they talked on till lunch time, and after lunch took Mr. Ellerslie a long and lovely drive through the mountains.

"I declare, Norah, we forgot those letters, they must be answered," said Rupert when they returned.

"What letters?" she asked.

"Why, Mr. Browne's and Lord Carlingfield's," he replied.

"Oh yes, of course; well, you can give a very satisfactory reason for my declining both offers, now," she replied, looking at him lovingly. "Oh, doctor—(Rupert then)—I am so happy!"

"And you will never repent of all you are giving up for my sake?" he asked.

"Giving up—what am I giving up?" she asked in surprise.

"Rank, a title and a position far above that I can offer you," he replied, "and then the difference in our ages—Lord Carlingfield—"

"Lord Carlingfield is not the man I love," answered Norah, gravely; "I respect him, but I could never love him. I am gaining everything, giving up nothing in marrying you, Rupert. It is you who are giving up a great deal in marrying me—yes—ah! that is no argument."

But what "that" was she did not explain, and Rupert kissed her again.

The lawyers settled their part of the matrimonial business as quickly as could be expected, and only six weeks' after Mr. Ellerslie's visit to Thurston, a quiet wedding took place from his little house in Mount-street. He stood in place of a father to Norah for that day, and gave her away at church as well as providing the wedding breakfast, a small and simple, but very tasteful one, for the guests did not number over a dozen, neither Norah nor Rupert having any relatives to ask to it, and only one or two friends, real friends, whom they wished to be present at it.

After it was over the happy pair started to spend their honeymoon at Mr. Ellerslie's place in Devonshire, after which they were to return and take up their abode at Thurston for the summer months, where Mrs. Grantham, now installed there as housekeeper, was waiting to receive them.

So Oliver Desborough's wishes were realised, notwithstanding the impossibility of their being so at the time he had expressed them, and written to his friend to implore him to carry them out, and neither Norah nor Rupert Hasted ever regretted the day when he had accepted the trust left him by his old friend, and become his daughter's guardian.

[THE END.]

## HOW SCARBROUGH MARRIED FOR MONEY.

—30—

"So you see, Leith, a man must have money, and if he has not the good luck to be born to it, society must furnish him with it in one way or another. I am not particular about the way, but I am particular about the money."

"So it seems," I said, concisely.

My friend Scarbrough laughed shortly, settling himself afresh on his sofa cushions, and favouring me with a side-long glance from under the long black lashes the young women admired so devoutly.

"Yes," he said. "Accordingly you will observe, Leith, that I deem it expedient to marry money, when I marry—if I marry."

"Well?"

"Oh, by no means!" he returned, lightly. "Not well. Quite the reverse. It is not moral, you know; but it is unavoidable. Such resolutions are always fished in the end; and those who make them are always the most contemptible of clumsily diplomatic rascals; but I am invariably conscious of sympathizing with them. It must be so unpleasant to be fished."

"You are not far wrong in either comparison or conclusion," I said. "But suppose you loved a woman?"

"I ask pardon," he interrupted, as lightly as ever; "but I don't suppose any such thing, Leith. I don't love a woman—I can't afford to."

Now as I am going to tell the story of my friend Scarbrough, I wish to tell it correctly, and so shall take the liberty of telling it just as it occurred—just as I afterwards learned that it occurred—not as it appeared to me at the time that certain events connected with it came under my immediate observation.

My friend Scarbrough was, as you may imagine, by no means a rich man.

The fact was that Scarbrough, the elder, had been an aristocratic, talented scapegrace, and Scarbrough, the younger, suffered for it morally and otherwise.

Scarbrough, the elder, had brought up his only son as such men always do bring up their only sons. He had trained him to extravagance and high-handedness, inculcated in his mind all that was lavish and generous, and then had been guilty of the trifling inconsistency of dying and leaving him without a penny.

Consequently Scarbrough was at a loss.

The incidental expenses of the most popular man in a crack regiment were precisely six times the amount of said individual's receipts. Here was a problem to be solved, and, accordingly, a month or so after his father's death, Lieutenant Eldon Scarbrough made his appearance at my country-house in Yorkshire to ask for advice.

And here was the rub. I thought I, his oldest friend, was both able and willing to assist him, but he would have none of me.

Humanity is unavoidably human in its inconsistencies; and here was a man who could talk half seriously of marrying for money, and who could not accept a penny from the hands of an old friend who had loved him from his very childhood.

"Old fellow," he said, seriously, "I cannot do that, you know—I really can't. Let us wait awhile and see what turns up. Something may turn up. Things do sometimes. If I cannot do better I can at least emigrate, and keep sheep, and end life as governor of a penal colony, where the society is good. Let us wait awhile, Leith."

So we waited awhile, a few weeks, in which Scarbrough's dark, romantic-looking face grew something graver and more thoughtful, and during which also we had our little discussions, always careless and half jesting on Scarbrough's part, but never so on mine, about this matter of marrying money.

Perhaps, in my crusty old-bachelor way, I made too much of the vein of seriousness which I fancied ran through his satirical speeches; at any rate they troubled me.

I could not bear the thought that the world could have so changed the bright, fearless, high-spirited boy I had known twenty years ago.

So matters stood when my young friend Scarbrough's romance opened its first chapter.

He had been out shooting all day, and, returning in the evening, was going up the old-fashioned stone staircase, when he heard, on the flight above him, a curious light, tapping sound, and the rustle of a dress.

It was none of the under servants, he knew, for he had passed the open door of the servants' hall, and seen them there assembled; and it could not be the housekeeper, for the rustle of the estimable Miss Stanley's garments had not so soft a sweep as this; and, besides, Miss Stanley did not come down with that queer, ghostly little swing and tap.

A few long strides took him to the bend of the stairs, and he looked up.

He saw what it was then. On the landing above was a huge Gothic window, of painted glass, and in the rich glow, cast by its warmth of colour, stood a girl, looking down at him, just as he was looking up at her—a girl dressed in black, and swinging upon a pair of slender ebony crutches—a girl so slender in form, so dark and bitter of face, that for all her youth and beauty she looked almost uncanny.

Her long black eyes were as scornful as might be; her hair was rolled back from her brow like a tragedy queen's in a play, and one slipped foot hung loose and helpless, not touching the carpet at all.

For an instant the two regarded each other in silence, and then the girl put out her crutches again and began to descend.

She looked as if his sudden appearance irritated her, or as if she was angry with herself for pausing, for, as she came downward, swinging rapidly and lightly from step to step, with the queer little ghostly tap he had heard, she kept her eyes dropped persistently upon the ground.

But my friend Scarbrough had a passion for novel faces, and the novelty of this one interested him, so, as she passed, he stepped aside, raising his hat.

"Excuse me," he said, apologetically, glancing at his gun. "I did not know any one was coming."

She lifted her eyes, giving him an indifferent sidelong glance.

"There is room enough for both of us," she said, coldly; "and I am not afraid of the gun."

She was such a very extraordinary girl, with her bitter, dark young face, and her scornful eyes, that, taking her sudden appearance into consideration, Scarbrough was half inclined to think she might be the unquiet spirit of some of the long-dead dames in the rooms below; but when she reached the bottom of the staircase he saw there was no fear of that at least.

She turned into the housekeeper's room.

When, as he was dressing, a servant came up to bring him hot water his curiosity got the better of his discretion, and he put a question to him as carelessly as possible.

"I met a young lady on the staircase, when I came in," he said, "a young lady dressed in black and using crutches. Who is she?"

"Dressed in black, and using a crutch, sir? Yes, sir," said the man. "Miss Gervase Howth, sir. Miss Stanley's niece. She came here for her health, and don't often leave her room. Very pleasant young person, sir."

My friend Scarbrough stopped abruptly in his dextrous manipulations of his two hair-brushes, and turned upon the fellow with a very effective stare, which at length faded into a sort of gradual recognition.

"Eh?" he said. "Oh, yes, to be sure. But look here, my good fellow, perhaps, on the whole, you had better confine your eulogies of pleasant young persons to the pleasant young persons in the kitchen. They might not be appreciated by Miss Howth, who appears to me to be a young lady rather out of the ordinary run of young ladies. Thank you for the hot water, my good fellow. You can go downstairs now. I shall not need your assistance. The house-keeper's niece, eh?"

I was waiting for him in the dining room when he came in, whistling softly as he had a habit of doing when he was in a reflective mood.

During dinner he was rather silent; but, as

we never interfered with each other's moods or whimsicalities, I left him to himself, until, as we sat over our walnuts and wine, the spell of his reticence was suddenly broken.

"Miss Gervase Howth," he began, reflectively, helping himself to a fine cluster of hot-house grapes.

"What?" I interrupted. "You have seen Miss Gervase Howth, have you?"

"Yes," he replied, composedly. "By-the-by, what a very remarkable young lady Miss Gervase Howth is."

"Very," I replied, dryly. "Though wherein remarkable I can scarcely see."

"She has a remarkable face," he said. "She has a remarkable pair of eyes. She looks like a Mexican, or an Egyptian, or a Banshee. I like remarkable girls."

He looked remarkable enough himself as he said it—remarkably prepossessing.

That reflective look was always becoming to him, and just at that moment his almond-shaped dark eyes were full of it.

He was a handsome fellow, my friend Scarbrough.

"You mean you like Gervase Howth?" I asked dubiously.

"Considering the length of our acquaintance, yes. I really should say yes, Leith."

And then, all at once, he seemed to awake, as it were, and the reflective quiet left his face in a second.

It seemed an odd thing enough this conversation of ours, brief as it was; and it was especially odd that, Scarbrough, of all men in the world, should have frankly announced a whimsical fancy for a whimsical, abrupt girl whom he had chanced to meet upon the staircase; but the oddest part of the business was that this was by no means the last of it.

In that nonchalant style which was all his own he took to promeneading with his cigar in the interminable old corridors, which were necessarily most frequented; he sauntered up and down the terraces fronting the house-keeper's room, and mounted the staircase occasionally, with as collected an ease of manner as if he had held in view any other object in the world but that which I knew to be his sole one, namely, to meet Gervase Howth.

But for two weeks he saw nothing of her; and at the end of the second week it was she who stumbled upon him, and not he upon her.

He had been sitting alone for some time in my library, and it so chanced was musing in the fitful glow of the fire, watching the embers dropping from the grate, when he heard, at the end of the corridor, the distant echo of the queer, ghostly little tap, and, in a very few moments more, the heavy door creaked on its hinges, as it swung backward to admit the slight, black-robed figure awaying lightly upon the ebony crutches.

The girl came forward to the hearth. That she did not know the room had an occupant her first words proved to him.

"It's empty at last, I see," she said. "I thought they would never go."

Then my friend Scarbrough rose and confronted her.

"Excuse me, Miss Howth," he said. "I regret extremely to be compelled to announce that I have been so unfortunate as to remain behind."

She started slightly, as might be expected, but she did not look at all confused, though it was evident that his presence annoyed her.

"Oh," she said, coolly, "there is someone here then. I thought everyone had gone to bed. Not that it matters. I don't suppose I shall disturb you. I am only going to read. I often come here when I cannot sleep. I have Mr. Leith's permission."

Scarbrough met her indifferent glance with as little amazement as it was possible to exhibit under the circumstances.

There was something mysterious about the girl.

Her appearance itself had been a puzzle to him, and here she was again, after a two weeks' absence, looking as unaccountable as ever.

"But the question is," he said, aloud, "whether I shall disturb you or not?"

She had just turned away to light a lamp, and was resting upon one crutch and holding the taper to the wick, as she answered him, scarcely glancing over her shoulder.

"Why should you?" she said.

Not being able to explain exactly why he should, or even why he should not, Scarbrough remained silent and watched her.

She moved about the room as if she was well acquainted with it, and as if she was by no means accustomed to having any restraint placed upon her.

The lamp lighted, she replenished the fire, and then took up a volume and seated herself at the table to read.

She was so decidedly indifferent to any other presence than her own that a man of less composed temperament would have found her almost trying.

My friend Scarbrough did not. He took up a book also, and settled himself down to enjoy it, with intervals of quiet examination of her intent face.

"It is a very pretty face," was his inward comment. "It is more—it is a striking face, with delicately decisive lines. Those two straight little marks between her eyebrows are pretty, but painful—they mean something. Yes, to be sure. I see; they mean those little ebony crutches. Poor little girl! Poor little girl!"

On his way to bed he came in to see me for a few minutes, and the reflective look was in his eyes again, and I may add was as becoming as ever.

I was always an idiot about my friend Scarbrough's beauty, even when he was only my pet Scarbrough at eight years old.

"I only came in to mention to you that I have seen Miss Howth again," he said; "and though I have not made much progress as yet, I do not despair of improving the acquaintance. Among other things, I have observed a pin in her hair which I should very much like to take out. I want to see her with her hair down over her shoulders. I like to see girls with their hair over their shoulders; Gervase Howth's would make a mantle that would fall to her knee if she would dispense with that pin."

"Eldon!" I said, a trifle sternly, "I must say you are a rather unaccountable fellow. What do you mean by talking such arrant nonsense about a girl in whom you can have no possible interest?"

He was looking down at the fire with that very becoming air of quiet reflection, and he still looked down at it as he replied,—

"Miss Gervase Howth understood!" he quivered.

"Yes," I growled, "of course."

"Well, then," he said, slowly, "I will admit that I have an interest in her. Good-night, my dear fellow," and he wheeled round and strode out of the room.

Just a week and a half from that date I looked out of my window accidentally, and having looked once, looked again with some secret excitement. My friend Scarbrough was walking slowly along one of the terraces with a companion, and that companion was no other than Gervase Howth.

The girl was swinging along in her bird-like fashion, as usual, but instead of having her black hair rolled away from her face and knotted, as she had been in the habit of wearing it, I saw that it hung loose over her shoulders, below her waist, as he had said it would, and in soft, crumpled waves.

She was laughing, too, as I had never heard her laugh before, and there was a clear dark red on her delicate, dusky skin.

It occurred to my mind at that instant that my friend Scarbrough must have made, during that week and a half, a most unaccountably rapid headway indeed.

The friendship, or whatever it was, progressed with remarkable smoothness after this. I found myself to some extent deserted, and the acquaintance of the estimable Miss Stanley was cultivated to my neglect. It was cultivated in a delicate and apparently accidental way, of course; but it was still cultivated.

No one of the household had ever heard Gervase Howth's voice or laugh before; but we



began to hear it now, and in my lonely room. I must confess, that its sound warmed my old heart not a little. Perhaps the blight on her young life might pass away after all, I thought.

You see, even elderly bachelor as I was, I had found some time before that the slender little ebony crutches had been a bitter, bitter burden for Gervase Howth to bear.

"When I first saw them," she said to Eldon Scarbrough once, "I prayed that I might drop dead. It was wicked, wasn't it? but it is true. I could not bear to touch them; it was weeks before I ever did touch them; I hated them so—I was so afraid of them. It seemed like giving up all my hope. And then, from hating the crutches and myself, I began to hate other people—people who were strong and straight. I have not quite overcome that yet, though it isn't exactly hate now, it is something else deeper, something that hurts me here;" and she pressed her thin little clenched hand against her side as she looked up at him.

The accident which had occasioned her lameness had happened a year before. She had met with a terrible fall, which had brought on inflammation of a joint. She had now almost entirely given up all hope of ever being able to throw aside her crutches, though her physician did not despair of making some improvement upon her condition.

It was singular, Scarbrough thought, that while she was so frank upon this subject she was so reticent upon other topics.

She never told him anything of her past life, indeed rarely referred to it, except in the most distant manner. She seemed averse to mentioning it, consequently he decided that it must have been an unpleasant one, and was as cautious of recurring to the subject as she herself was.

It was about three months after he had first heard the ghostly little tapping upon the staircase that my friend Scarbrough suddenly arrived at a very remarkable conclusion, and, after two or three days' pondering over it, with the becoming reflectiveness, broached the subject to me, his oldest friend—a friend old enough to be his grandfather almost, and, consequently, the best person he could have broached it to.

I had been watching him, admiring him in fact, admiring his graceful length and strength of limb and indolent grace of position, as he lounged in an easy-chair, opposite to mine upon the hearth, when all at once he got up and stood before me, reflective no longer, indolent no longer; on the contrary, erect, purposeful, and determined.

"Leith," he said, with startling abruptness, "will you be so obliging as to look at me as I am physically?"

I looked at him. Weak old fellow that I am I admired him still more.

As I have said before, my friend Scarbrough's physical beauty was always too much for me.

"Well," I said.

"I thank you," he returned. "Thank you for 'well,' if it is well. What I wished to find out was whether it is as well as I should wish it to be. Physically I am a strong sort of fellow. What should you say about mentally, my dear Leith?"

I looked at him again.

"Mentally," I commented. "Perhaps I should say 'well,' as before."

"Thank you a second time," he answered. "Now, my dear Leith, am I worthy of a woman's love at all—the love, if I could gain it, of such a woman as Gervase Howth?"

I must confess that my heart leaped—yes, positively leaped from sheer exultation. He was going to come out right, despite my fears. The world had not spoiled him after all.

"What!" I exclaimed. "Eldon, my boy, Eldon!"

He coloured, as if he had been a boy indeed—this great, tall, handsome fellow who was almost thirty years old.

"I have been thinking of this for some time, my dear Leith," he said, with some hesitation. I interrupted him.

"You have known her just three months, and besides, I thought you were going to marry money."

"So did I," was his brief rejoinder.

Then he made a clean breast of it.

Despite his old cynical resolutions, despite his poverty, despite the thousand and one things that were against him, he had fallen in love, yes, unfeignedly in love in the good old fashion with a little girl who had nothing in the world to bring him but a beautiful, uncanny young face, and a pair of ebony crutches.

It was inconsistent of course. Common-sense people might call it absurd, but it was the unavoidable result of his past life and early training.

He had been accustomed to pleasing himself and following his impulses so long, that he had forgotten self-interest and worldliness in his whimsical fancy for Gervase Howth until it was too late, and he had awakened to find himself entangled in a very curious fashion; and here he was at the eleventh hour coming to me for advice.

"I have not spoken openly to her yet," he explained. "I wanted to know your opinion first as to whether it would be best for her. I have nothing to offer her, and consequently I feel some slight delicacy in offering it," he said, in his odd, light way. "But then it has really occurred to me of late that I might work—keep books, for instance, or drive an omnibus, or emigrate anywhere there might be 'an opening,' as our mutual friend Micawber has it."

So in the end it was agreed upon that he should speak to Gervase Howth the next day, and hear what she had to say upon the subject, and his plans were to depend upon her answer.

But, strange to say, the next day he could find no opportunity of speaking to her.

He did not see her at all, and on the following day he was as unsuccessful, whereupon he waited upon the estimable Miss Stanley, and with great tranquillity inquired for her young relative.

Miss Stanley coughed disapprovingly.

He had never been able to win upon her much, with all his thoroughbred ease of manner.

"Gervase is not here, Lieutenant Scarbrough," she said. "I thought you knew that. She went away two days ago. I think she got tired of staying."

Scarbrough was confounded. But it was not Gervase he blamed when he came to tell me about it.

"It is Miss Stanley who is to blame," he said. "She has sent her away herself, and professes not to remember whether she has gone."

To which observation I made very little reply, for reasons of my own, which perhaps time will explain.

For a few days my friend Scarbrough was rather out of humour and spirits, though, of course, he did not quite despair of hearing something of Gervase at some not too far distant period; but at last he came to me once more with his usual abruptness.

"I want some letters of introduction, Leith," he said.

"Letters of introduction to whom, and what for?" I asked.

"To men of business," he answered. "To bankers, or merchants, or shippers—to any in fact who might be likely to give me something to do. It is no use waiting for things to turn up any longer; the time has come to make an effort at turning them up myself."

I gave him what he asked for readily, though I must acknowledge to a weak-minded twinge of regret at seeing all my old air-castles tumble down into such complete chaos of ruin.

I had cherished great dreams of my favourite's future, and there seemed something almost painfully incongruous in the idea of the handsomest and most popular man in his regiment descending to the prosaic drudgery and detail of a merchant's office.

The following laconic epistle reached me a week afterward,—

"MY DEAR LEITH,—Your letter to Bateman and Trent procured me a place in their house at a reasonable remuneration. Met half a dozen brother officers since I have been here—Gross among the lot. Explained the fact of my impecuniosity to them, and was sympathised

with accordingly. Also received six invitations to dinner on the spot, which I refused, giving impecuniosity as a reason. Admit to some slight depression of spirits, but hope to be able to fight against it pretty well. If you had heard anything of Gervase Howth you would, of course, have notified me.

"Believe me, dear Leith, yours gratefully,  
"SCARBROUGH."

Such letters as this came to me at intervals for several months, during which I remained quietly in the old house in Yorkshire, making little plans of my own, and attending to my own business generally.

I had plenty of business to attend to, and two or three little plans to lay.

The first piece of business was the making of my will, in which I bequeathed all my worldly goods and chattels, houses, nick-nacks, and personal property, to my young friend, Eldon Scarbrough, in conjunction with another relative of mine, who was to share it with him under divers penalties and conditions.

Old people have their fancies, and I had mine, and this was one of them.

The only thing that troubled me was that this handsome rascal of a favourite of mine would not let me endow him with his rights and privileges before my death.

But fortune was at work in another quarter for him it appeared.

He held to his purpose for a full year, during which he saw nothing of Gervase Howth, even heard nothing of her, and yet was working for her sake, and never despairing of finding her some day.

Of course he would find her; a man of his stamp is not likely to fail in his endeavours to find a woman whom he has lost sight of.

I began to understand him after a while. He wanted to try himself first, and then he would set himself to the task of looking for the woman whom he loved, and of whom he had proved himself worthy.

But at the end of the year, when the leaves were lying in brown heaps under the elms, a carriage drew up to the house from the road leading to the railroad station, and my friend Scarbrough surprised me somewhat by getting out.

He looked as soldierly, as handsome, and as tranquilly unconcerned as ever.

"My dear Eldon!" I exclaimed.

"My dear Leith!" he said.

I am sure that as we grasped hands we were as heartily glad to see each other as if we had greeted one another in a far more demonstrative fashion.

We sat down together, and, gaining time to look at him again, I saw that he had something to tell me—some by no means unpleasant tidings if I was a judge of expression—and so it proved.

"I have some news for you, Leith," he said.

"Good or bad?" queried I.

"I should call it good," he answered. "I find it so in a superlative degree. I am free again at last—free to follow my own inclinations, I mean. I am a reasonably rich man again."

"What!" I exclaimed.

This at least was unexpected.

"If three thousand a year will make me so, I am a reasonably rich man," he repeated. "Do you remember hearing me speak of an elderly spinster sister of my father living in Cumberland, and refusing to recognise the scapegrace branch of the family?"

I remembered it well.

"What! Miss Rachael Scarbrough?"

"Miss Rachael Scarbrough. And Miss Rachael Scarbrough died a month or so ago, leaving her possession to me for the somewhat eccentric reason that I was not like her hair-brained brother Francis, and had proved myself unlike him by working for my living instead of subsisting on other people. So said the will. How Miss Rachael Scarbrough found me out I cannot say. I am much obliged to her, however. And now, my dear Leith, about Gervase Howth."

But I had nothing to tell him about Gervase Howth just then. Since the day of her mysterious disappearance Gervase Howth had certainly not returned to the house.

"Then," said my friend Scarbrough, "may I ask you to ring for Miss Stanley and assist me in making inquiries?"

"Certainly," I replied, and rang the bell at once.

You see it was as I knew it would be. My friend Scarbrough was not the man to be nonplussed easily.

Miss Stanley made her appearance on my message being carried to her, erect, disapproving, uncompromising, and rigid of form.

I preferred my friend Scarbrough's request to her in as few words as possible.

For a moment she looked at me and then at Scarbrough, then she looked at me again (as Scarbrough told me afterwards) questioningly, as if she wanted to make sure that I was in earnest about the matter.

"You will confer a great favour upon us both," I suggested, gently, breaking the pause.

"She is at Ryde, Mr. Leith," she said, finally. "She went there when she left here. Her half-brother sent her to a medical establishment where there is a celebrated physician who makes a speciality of bone diseases."

"Thank you, Miss Stanley," I said, and with a stately courtesy the estimable Stanley took her departure.

"My dear Leith," said Scarbrough when she had gone, "I am going at once to Ryde."

"My dear Eldon, I will go with you."

A few days more and we were comfortably situated in a comfortable hotel in Ryde, and Eldon having, through my intervention with Stanley, obtained the address of the celebrated personage who made a speciality of bone diseases, was, on the second morning after our arrival, making preparations for paying his establishment a visit when I came to his room on a little business of my own.

"I have just chanced upon a young relative of mine, Eldon," I explained—"a young person whom I should like to introduce you to. It appears she is staying in the hotel for a rest of a day or so on her way to England. She is rather a pretty girl, too, something of Gervase Howth's style about her. I had no idea she was so pretty until I met her just now."

"What relation did you say?" asked Scarbrough, unlocking his valise. "I did not know you had any relation."

"I didn't say what relation, I believe," was my careless reply; "but the fact is that her mother was my father's second wife."

"Half-sister, then," said Scarbrough, evidently not hearing half I was saying. "Where has she been all these years?"

"At school," I answered. "Come downstairs as soon as you are ready, Eldon, my boy. We shall be in one of the parlours together."

"I will be there in fifteen minutes," he called after me as I closed the door, and I went down to the parlour to await him accordingly.

He was punctual enough on this occasion truly; perhaps because he was so anxious to pay his visit to the celebrated personage who made a speciality of bone diseases.

At any rate he entered the parlour before the specified fifteen minutes had elapsed, and I met him in the middle of the room, with my half-sister on my arm—a girl with soft, thick black hair falling over her shoulders; a girl with a delicate, finely-lined dark face, with two straight little marks between the eyebrows; a girl with big black eyes, and a straight, little figure, well balanced upon two firm, pretty feet; my half-sister, as I have said, but no less a person than Gervase Howth herself.

"Leith!" he exclaimed, and then stood thunderstruck, looking from one to the other.

"Gervase," I said, patting her hand, "tell him all about it."

Gervase looked up at him, straight into his eyes, yet colouring a little, in a very pretty way.

"I had been at school at Heidelberg ever since I was a child," she said; "but after my fall Herbert took me away, and carried me to the sea side, where I stayed until I was strong enough to use my crutches. Then I came to Yorkshire just the day after you did, and was foolish enough to be angry with you for being there. I

was so peevish, and so sensitive that I would not listen to anything Herbert said, but insisted on staying with Miss Stanley, so that you would not even know I was in the house. I could not bear the thought of a stranger seeing me. The servants had never met me before, and none of them knew me; so some of them got the idea that I was the housekeeper's niece, and I let them think so.

"Then I met you by accident, and we grew to be good friends, and as soon as that happened Herbert took a fancy. He said I must let you think I was Miss Stanley's niece just as the rest did. So I let you think so, until one day he whisked me off to Ryde to be cured, and I was cured; and here I am, Lieutenant Scarbrough. What Herbert meant Herbert himself must explain."

"What Herbert meant needs no explanation," broke out Scarbrough. "My dear old friend, Heaven bless you!"

And he grasped my free hand with the grip of a giant, his handsome eyes growing suspiciously moist.

"My dear young fellow," I said, "Heaven bless you!"

I delivered my pretty Gervase up to him, turned round and walked out of the room.

And so it turned out that, in spite of his conversation, and in spite of his disinterestedness, my friend Scarbrough married for money after all.

## FACETTE.

STYLET: "I never saw any one so happy over an engagement as she is over hers." Miss Elase: "Yes, it's her first, you know."

"How I pity the poor fellows whose business requires them to be out on a night like this," said the policeman, looking out from the side door.

HUSBAND: "You don't appear to like Mrs. Sweetie." Wife: "The horrid thing! I hate her! Next time we meet I'll kiss her only once, and I shan't ask after her baby."

"AND this is the baby, is it? Why, it's the very image of its father." Cynical Uncle: "Well, it needn't mind that as long as it has good health."

IRATE GERMAN (to stranger who has stepped on his toe): "Mine front, I know mine feet was meant to be walked on, but dot privilege belongs to me."

MR. SOFTLIGHT (waking in the middle of the night): "My dear, I am sure there is a man in the house." Mrs. S.: "Go to sleep again, Algy, you are flattering yourself."

MISS THIRTY FIVE: "Mr. Singleton, why don't you take some nice girl to accompany you on the ocean of life?" Mr. Singleton: "I would if I were sure the ocean would be Pacific."

FOOTLIGHTS: "Our company produced your play last night." Scribbler (in ecstasy): "Did the audience call for the author?" Footlights: "Yes. They knew we were not to blame."

TALKUM: "Professor Garner says that monkeys do not actually converse, but confine themselves to single remarks on matters of importance." Thinkum: "Dear me! How man has degenerated."

SCENE Railway Carriage: "What's the matter, old boy? Can I help you? Two heads are better than one, you know." Old Boy (groaning): "One is more than enough of the kind I have this morning."

MURPHY: "Was your amateur minstrel show a success?" McKell: "Not quite; you see we tried the experiment of springing a few new jokes, and the audience was so disappointed that they got up and left the hall."

"WOMEN, my boy," said a parent to his son, "are a delusion and a snare." "It is queer," murmured the boy, "how people will hug a delusion." And while the old man looked queerly at him, the young man hunted up his tennis racquet and went out to be deluded.

TEACHER: "Now, Johnnie, you may tell us this: Suppose your mother had told you to come home at five o'clock, and you did not go; what would you be doing?" "I don't know whether it would be swimmin' or playin' base-ball."

"How does it happen," remarked the captain to the lieutenant, "you didn't marry old Richman's daughter?" "Oh, the family was dead against it." "But what about the girl?" "Well, you see, she happened to be one of the family."

JANE: "If you please, ma'am, as it's my night out, would you mind lending me your bicycle?" Mistress: "Oh, certainly, Jane; take it by all means. And if you look in my wardrobe you'll find a pair of last season's knickerbockers, which you may have if you like."

"WHAT did her father say when you told him that you wanted to marry his daughter, Rivers?" "Well, Banks, he didn't absolutely refuse, but he imposed a very serious condition." "What was it?" "He said he would see me hanged first."

MAUDE: "What on earth do you suppose makes Miss Elderly keep up that silly custom of looking under her bed before retiring?" Clara: "She's such a hopeful creature, it must be that she really counts on finding a man that way some time. It's her only chance, you know."

JESS: "I don't see how you can be such a goose as to engage yourself to Dickey Bird." BOSS: "He has a rich bachelor uncle." JESS: "Then why don't you marry the uncle?" BOSS: "I must have an introduction first, must I not?"

SAID A PLAYGOER: "The greatest misfortune that can, I suppose, happen to an actor is to lose his voice!" To which an actor replied: "No, sir; our greatest misfortune comes in when we have to play the part of a king or an emperor on the stage, and go to bed without supper."

WIFE: "What an idea, Otto! This is the first dinner I have ever cooked without assistance, and yet you have invited a friend to partake of it." Husband: "Well, Lizzie, I thought it better to be prepared for all emergencies, and the only reason why I invited the friend is because he happens to be a doctor."

"Do you think young Richleigh will call here again?" "I think he will, papa. I did everything I could to entertain him, and when he went away I gave him a cigar out of your desk." "Out of my desk? Clara, unless that young man is desperately in love with you, you'll never see him again."

POMPOUS MAIDEN LADY (engaging servant, who has taken the liberty to sit down without being asked): "Do you know that it is a great breach of etiquette for any one to sit down in the presence of their superiors?" Bridget: "Lor', yes, ma'am; but kape your sate; I don't believe in them ancient superstitions."

CHEMIST (to assistant): "William, how much of that winter cough cure have we left?" William (counting): "Forty-two bottles, sir." Chemist (rubbing his hands): "Then get out that batch of summer medicine labels. When I'm running a first-class pharmacy I can't afford to have any unsaleable stuff lying about."

CRITIC: "How's the book going, old man?" Author: "Oh, all right, I fancy. The press has noticed it already. Yesterday's 'Roseleaves' hailed me as the coming Thackeray." Critic: "Ah! I wrote that." Author: "Did you really? How can I thank you! On the other hand, this week's 'Knacker' says that my novel is the poorest effort that has been turned out this season." Critic: "I wrote that, too."

THE NERVOUS WOMAN: "How long did you say it was before the train leaves?" Porter: "One hour and a half, ma'am." "Are you sure?" "Yes, ma'am." "That would make it safe for me to go out for a short time, wouldn't it?" "Certainly." "You are positive!" "Yes, ma'am. How far did you wish to go?" "I want to go over to that newsstand on the other side of the street and get a paper. But if I lose the train I'll report you, now mind."



## SOCIETY.

THE Emperor of Germany stands godfather to all seventh sons in Prussia.

THE Prince and Princess of Wales start for their four days visit to Wales on the 9th inst.

THE Princess of Wales will place the foundation stone of the Royal Alexandra Children's Hospital at Rhyl on the 15th of this month.

THE Princess of Wales is going to Denmark about the 23rd, and will remain abroad for nine or ten weeks.

THE Queen, the Cesarewicz, and the Khedive are expected to be present at the Prince and Princess of Wales's garden party. The Prince and Princess have so many engagements this summer which will take them out of town that it has been more than usually difficult to fix a day for this function.

THE visit of Prince Christian of Denmark to London is believed to be connected with a project for his betrothal to one of the daughters of the Prince of Wales. Such a marriage would be most acceptable to the Royal Family, and very popular both at home and in Denmark.

THE Empress Frederick has succeeded in reconciling the Emperor William to the Duchess of Sparta, who was formerly his favourite sister, but he had ceased all communication with her since she joined the Greek Orthodox Church, a step which was eminently desirable for several reasons, but his Majesty resented it with extreme bitterness.

A CURIOUS opening has been found for the exercise of artistic gifts by women. It seems that in the great hospitals water-colour sketches are taken of rare forms of disease, and in this somewhat uncanny class of work women have succeeded. At Guy's a lady has been appointed for this work for six months, the post having been previously filled by her husband, who is temporarily incapacitated.

THAT a royal wedding is an expensive luxury for more than the chief personages concerned is shown by recent statistics. The various illustrious guests who attended the marriage of the Grand Duke and Duchess of Hesse left, after their departure from Coburg, the very respectable sum of £1,750 to be divided as *Trinkgeld*, and this does not include the many valuable gifts bestowed, amounting in value to over fifteen hundred pounds more.

COWORTH PARK, Sir William Farmer's place at Sunningdale, is one of the finest and most picturesque domains in this part of England. The house is a stately old mansion, which was splendidly redecorated and refurbished a few years ago, when it was altered generally and improved. There are about eight acres of lawn and shrubbery round the house, and an exceedingly pretty flower-garden, with very large conservatories, which are well stocked with choice flowers. There is a famous vineyard, containing the companion vine to the one at Hampton Court. The park is well-wooded, and has some beautiful groves and avenues of beech, chestnut, spruce, and Scotch fir. The Prince and Princess of Wales stayed at Coworth for Ascut more than once when the place belonged to Mr. Arbuthnot.

THERE is a curious division of authority at the State Balls and State Concerts. The invitations are issued by the Lord Chamberlain, who has entire control over the ball-room, the galleries, and the staircase. In the supper-room and in the refreshment-room the Lord Steward is supreme. It has sometimes happened that officials belonging to the department of the Lord of Green Cloth (of which the Lord Steward is the head), who were on duty at the Palace, have been excluded from the ball-room and its vicinity by the Lord Chamberlain's people, but were nevertheless privileged to sup with the guests. On the other hand, some of the Lord Chamberlain's people who were on duty in and about the ball-room, were not allowed by the Lord Steward's people to enter the supper-room, but were obliged to refresh themselves downstairs.

## STATISTICS.

SCIENTISTS are of opinion that some icebergs last for 200 years.

A PERFECTLY proportioned man weighs twenty-eight pounds for every foot of his height.

DURING the last century 100 lakes in the Tyrol have subsided and disappeared.

TWELVE thousand infants are annually received at a founding asylum in Moscow. The boys are trained for the navy.

IN Spain it costs £20,000,000 to maintain the army and only £300,000 to educate the children. It is the exception to find a Spanish farmer who is able to read or write.

THE average number of working days in a year in various countries is as follows:—In Russia, 287; in Britain, 278; in Spain, 290; in Austria, 265; in Italy, 298; in Bavaria and Belgium, 300; in Saxony and France, 302; in Denmark, Norway, and Switzerland, 303; in Prussia, 305; in Holland and North America, 308; and in Hungary, 312.

## GEMS.

PROSPERITY unmasks the vices; adversity reveals the virtues.

GOOD luck and bad luck is but a synonyme in the great majority of instances, for good and bad judgment.

BE cheerful. It is better to live in sunshine than in gloom. If a cloud rests upon your heart, turn its silver lining to your friends, and the glow of cheer it will cast upon them will be reflected on you, and the cloud will give way before the brightness and joy its own light has begotten.

OF all passions that can take possession of the heart or brain jealousy is the worst. For many generations the chemists sought for the secret by which all metals could be changed to gold, and through which the basest could become the best. Jealousy seeks exactly the opposite. It endeavours to transmute the very gold of love into the dross of shame and crime.

## HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

LAYER CAKE.—Cream one cup of sugar with one tablespoonful of butter; add the yolk of one egg, beaten light, and one and one-half cups of flour, and beat until smooth; add the white of the egg beaten stiff, and two teaspoonfuls of baking powder. Turn into greased layer cake tins, and bake twenty minutes.

PICKLE FOR BEER.—Three quarters of a pound of salt, two ounces brown sugar, half ounce salt-petre, one teaspoonful each of cloves, allspice, mace, peppercorns, a tablespoonful of dried herbs, three quarts of water; boil, and pour boiling over your beef, and it will be good; leave for a fortnight. It will do to add to your potted head, but it is better without it.

TREACLE CANDY.—Four pounds of treacle, one desert spoonful vinegar, half teaspoonful baking soda, boil the treacle and vinegar, slowly stirring, nearly twenty minutes, try a little in cold water, if it snaps it is ready; then stir the soda in very quickly, and pour out on a buttered dish. Another—One pound sugar, one cup treacle, half cup of water, one teaspoonful cream of tartar; boil well as before; when done these may be pulled out, and then with scissors cut into balls.

RHUBARB PRESERVE.—Wash and dry the rhubarb, and cut it up into inch lengths; let it stand spread on a tray all night, then take a pound of sugar to each pound (after it is cut up), to each four pounds take one ounce of rough ginger and one teaspoonful of alum; put the sugar, ginger, and alum in a jellypan, and to each pound add half a teacup of water; let this boil for five minutes, then put in all the rhubarb; let it boil then for half an hour at a moderate rate. It should then thicken; put in pots for use.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

THE otter excels every animal in swimming. Its speed is superior to that of many fishes.

AN inventor has patented a device for illuminating keyholes for persons out late at night.

NEWFOUNDLAND is without reptiles. No snake, frog, toad or lizard has ever been seen there.

A FISH caught and thrown on the bank will rarely fail, when endeavouring to escape, to jump in the direction of the water.

IN Corfu, sheets of paper pass for money; one sheet buys one quart of rice or twenty sheets a piece of hemp cloth.

MOST of the numerous temples throughout China are painted red; everything lucky and pleasant among the Chinese is of vermilion colour.

IN many countries the rainbow is spoken of as a great bent pump or siphon tube, drawing water from the earth by mechanical means. In parts of Russia, in the Don country, and also in Moscow and vicinity, it is known by a name which is equivalent to "the bent water-pipe."

THE hollow trunks of the sour gourd tree of Africa, which are often of a capacity sufficient to furnish room for 40 or 50 bodies, are used as tombs by the native Africans, who suspend the remains of their departed friends and relatives on hooks fastened upon the interior of such trees for that purpose.

ASIDE from being a most palatable fruit, pineapples are counted by some physicians to possess medicinal properties, one stating that pure, fresh pineapple juice is an excellent tonic in cases of sore throat, and that he has known it to prove valuable as an adjunct remedial agent in diphtheria, helping to cut away without irritation the mucus from the tissue of the throat.

IT is a curious fact that the colour of yellow, whether it be vegetable or animal, is much more permanent than any other hue. The yellow of a flower's petals is the only colour known to botanists that is not faded or entirely discharged upon being exposed to the fumes of sulphurous acid. Take the viola tricolor (heart's ease) as an illustration. If exposed but a moment to these fumes the purple tint immediately takes its flight, and in the wail flower the yellow shines as brightly as ever after all other colours have fled.

THE little creature which possesses the distinction of having more legs than any other animal is that which belongs to the family of insects known as millipeds, or thousand footed. There are several different species of these, but they all possess the common characteristic of having segmented bodies, each segment of which is provided with its own pair of feet. These are set so closely along the body as to resemble hairs, and when they move one after another with perfect regularity the effect is precisely the same on a small scale as that of a field of oats undulating under the influence of the wind. Some species of millipeds have as many as three hundred and fifty separate and distinct legs. They are all perfectly harmless, unlike the centipeds, which frequently have the power of inflicting poisonous wounds.

FLEET STREET, London, boasts a unique specimen of the money-lending tribe, that of a usurer to newsboys. His rates are a trifle high—2d. on the 1s. for a brief loan—but then his risks are heavy. He has no security whatever for money lent; still there is a regular method to be pursued in negotiating a loan. No boy is advanced money unless another youngster answers for it that he is the sort of boy to repay a loan. No 2 does not become security, but it is a part of the agreement that if No. 1 fails to "come to time," the latter will receive a sound thrashing at the hands of his indorser. This is the only satisfaction the newsboy broker ever gets if one of his juvenile borrowers forgets to repay the loan. This, however, rarely happens.

## NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

S. K.—There are three Barons Rothschilds.  
 CON.—Registry offices are all private ventures.  
 ANNIE LAURIE.—The song refers to the fields of yore.  
 ANSWER.—There is only one way; by making inquiry.  
 CONSTANT READER.—The company is a purely local one.  
 IN TROUBLE.—Apply at the head office, Scotland-yard.  
 DOLLY.—A Roman nose is prominent and arched; squinting.  
 J. A. N.—The climate is decidedly favourable to those in your condition.  
 E. S.—From wheat chafed; it is used for many purposes.  
 INQUIRER.—The passage is in "Midsummer's Night's Dream."  
 ONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW.—No; you have no claim on the landlord for the repairs.  
 ONE IN DOUBT.—Write to Secretary, Inland Revenue, Somerset House, London.  
 ANXIOUS FATHER.—Why not send him to one of the national schools.  
 NESTA.—As a rule, the young man should commence the correspondence.  
 PUZZLED READER.—There are several Trespass Acts, but none against simple trespass.  
 TOSOMANCA.—A person is his in or her teens until they reach their twentieth birthday.  
 O. R.—There is no method of dissolving manufactured India rubber.  
 A CONSTANT READER.—Nothing is more effective than rubbing with chloroform, or benzine.  
 RUTH.—Tooth powder is an excellent cleanser of fine filigree jewelry.  
 CAROLINE.—Last Handel Festival in London was on June 19th, 23rd, 24th and 26th, 1891.  
 K. K.—It depends upon the rules of the club and the wish of the member.  
 JOSEPH.—Nickel (or rather electro) plating is done by means of an electric battery.  
 P. Y.—There is an agreement made before-hand as to who is to pay.  
 WHATEVER.—Your neighbour has no right to attach his building to the wall of your house.  
 HARMON.—Mother gets a third and brothers and sisters the other two-thirds equally among them.  
 GILBERT.—The Royal Academy stands at the head of the annual art exhibitions of London.  
 E. M.—We neither know what the lawyer has done for you, nor the value he puts on his services.  
 CONSTANT READER, No. 2.—Your question as sent to us is incomplete, consequently we cannot give you an answer.  
 CHRISTIAN R.—We are not aware of any rates such as referred to.  
 JIMBO.—You do not say in what capacity you desire to ship, so it is impossible to give definite information.  
 INTERESTED ONE.—The member for your borough could procure you admission to view the Houses of Parliament.  
 WORRIED.—Try to get him into some almshouse; he would be more comfortable there than in the workhouse.  
 ONE WHO WOULD LIKE TO KNOW.—A debtor who, being able to pay, does not obey an order of the Court may be committed for contempt.  
 F. J.—The ecclesiastical district will not have a separate parish meeting, but will go with the parish generally.  
 TROUBLED MOTHER.—It is the swearing in that blinds the result; until that is done he is free; after, he is helplessly bound.  
 HOUSEWIFE.—Clothespins boiled a few minutes and quickly dried once or twice a month, become more durable.  
 ANNIE W.—Mealy potatoes are not good for warming over, or for use in a salad. New potatoes are the best for these purposes.  
 S. R.—If the goods can be shown to be the wife's separate property, they cannot be seized for the husband's debts.  
 OLD READER.—The angel fish is caught in Japan. It is of a most beautiful sky-blue colour, marked sometimes with rainbow tints.  
 SALLY KITT.—No person can tell another's destiny by knowing the time of his birth; and those who pretend to do so are impostors.  
 EUGEN.—Remarks on religious topics are out of place when it is known that the persons present differ widely in their professed creeds.  
 CROSBATCH.—The best way to deal with warts is to shave the top of them with a razor, as if you were paring a corn, then to touch them daily afterwards with acetic acid.

W. G.—Swimming is a most healthful exercise, and for that reason alone ought to be learnt by all who have the power to do so.

MAGGIE'S FRIEND.—She should know something about this young man's career before she permits herself to become more deeply interested in him.

J. F.—Spithead is the name applied to the eastern division of the strait that separates the Isle of Wight from the mainland.

X. Y.—Benzine applied carefully with a sponge will remove almost any stain on the vellum, and does not injure the texture.

IN GREAT DISTRESS.—To obtain an opinion of any value upon your case, it will be necessary for you to be examined by a medical man.

FLO.—The words *noblesse oblige* (French) are used to imply that noble birth imposes the obligation of high-minded principles and noble actions.

VENATION.—If the book is not the one you ordered you can refuse it; otherwise having signed the order, you may be compelled to take all the parts.

SEE.—There is nothing better among oils or more inexpensive than the best olive oil, which you can perfume with a little musk, rose or bergamot.

JEANNETTE.—Equal parts of precipitated sub-carbonate of iron and prepared chalk mixed together makes a good powder for cleaning plate.

## IF MOTHER WOULD LISTEN.

If mother would listen to me, dears,  
 She would freshen that faded gown,  
 She would sometimes take an hour's rest,  
 And sometimes a trip to town,  
 And it shouldn't be all for the children,  
 The fun, and the cheer, and the play;  
 With the patient drop on the tired mouth,  
 And the "Mother has had her day."

True, mother has had her day, dears,  
 When you were her babies three,  
 And she stopped about the farm and the house,  
 As busy as ever a bee.  
 When she rocked you all to sleep, dears,  
 And sent you all to school,  
 And wore herself out, and did without,  
 And lived by the Golden Rule.

And so your turn has come, dears,—  
 Her hair is growing white;  
 And her eyes are gaining the far-away look  
 That peers beyond the night.  
 One of these days, in the morning,  
 Mother will not be here;  
 She will fade away into silence,  
 The mother so true and dear.

Then, what will you do in the daylight,  
 And what in the gloaming then?  
 And father, tired and lone some then,  
 Pray, what will you do for him?  
 If you want to keep your mother,  
 You must make her rest to-day;  
 Must give her a share in the frolic,  
 And draw her into the play.

And if mother would listen to me, dears,  
 She'd buy her a gown of silk,  
 With buttons of royal velvet,  
 And ruffles as white as milk.  
 And she'd let you do the trotting,  
 While she sat still in her chair;  
 That mother should have it hard all through,  
 It strikes me isn't fair.

M. E. S.

MINA.—Bathing the face night and morning in a solution of powdered borax and water, and avoiding the use of very fat, greasy or rich food, will help to remove pimples.

R. N.—They trace their name to a Norman knight named Camp de Bullo, who came over with William the Conqueror, and taking service under the Scottish King, received large estates in Scotland.

ONE WHO HESITATES.—We know nothing of the concern in question, but we recommend you to beware of undertakings which offer higher advantages than any others of a similar kind.

A TWO YEARS' READER.—To clean bottles, cut a raw potato into small pieces, which put into the bottle with a tablespoonful of water. Shake well until every mark is removed.

HAT.—The only course open to you is to endeavour to obtain an introduction to the lady. If she wishes for your acquaintance, you may not find it impracticable to do so.

AMATEUR NURSE.—Liniments and ointments should always be applied to the patient with the hand; if applied with cotton or cloth, the good effect from the friction would be lost.

LETITIA.—By the term "classical music" is meant that which is universally accepted as the best of its kind, and the appreciation of which does not depend on a more passing taste.

POOR PHYLLIDA.—A solution of powdered borax and tepid water is an excellent remedy for weak and inflamed eyes. Bathe them as frequently as convenient, especially at night before retiring. If the soreness continues, consult an oculist.

MISERABLE BENEDICK.—Unless you have grounds for divorce, you are bound to maintain her if she becomes chargeable to the parish; but you are bound to admit her to your house.

B. B. C.—It is not known positively what the word means. By some it is thought to mean "silence" and to indicate a pause in music when the Scripture words were sung or chanted.

A. L.—After the juice has been squeezed from lemons, the pulp can be used for rubbing brass. Dip them in common salt, rub the brass thoroughly, then brush with dry bath-brick.

POLLY.—They can be washed by moving them to and fro through a cool, but not a cold, soap lather, afterwards rinsing well in clean water, dried on a line and then stuffed out.

VERENA.—Ink stains on clothes may be taken out by washing, first with pure water, next with soap and water, and lastly with lemon juice; but if old, they must be treated with oxalic acid.

NEO.—Boll meerschaum pipe in milk, removing scum as it rises to top, then when all is off, boiling a second time in new milk, will clean the pipe; removing scratches is, we think, beyond the power of an amateur.

CURIOUS CARRIE.—It is made up of the words "anti," meaning "against," and "macassar," a kind of oil, and thus was originally intended as a covering to chairs, sofas, &c., to keep them from being soiled by oil from the hair.

C. L. S.—Place one pound of sausage meat in a jar, stand it in a saucepan of boiling water, and steam for two hours. When nearly cold mash the meat well, add a slight flavouring of tarragon vinegar, press into pots, run melted butter over, and keep in a cool place.

W. P.—Swing your window so as to get the glass as nearly flat as possible, then take a saturated solution of Epsom salts—that is salts melted in water until some remains at bottom of dish like sugar in a cup—give panes coat with that, and they will be frosted so that no one can see through them; or take some white paint, and with a stiff brush "dab" it on the glass that is permanent.

LORNA.—In the thirteenth century, Wolfram von Eschenbach, a German Minnesinger, wrote a romance, the hero of which was Lohengrin, the Knight of the Swan. He was the son of Parsifal, but would not acknowledge his name. He sailed about in a boat drawn by a white swan, and disappeared when his bride endeavoured to ascertain his name and parentage. One of Wagner's most popular operas is based upon this story.

WORRIED NELL.—In the effort to remove pimples and freckles from the face, you will be aided by bathing it night and morning in a tolerably strong solution of powdered borax and water, and occasionally using in addition, a little glycerine diluted with a few drops of fresh lemon juice—the latter to be applied at intermediate times. Pimples are sometimes caused by a too generous indulgence in greasy food, which it were well to avoid.

GRATIAS.—Wash it with skimmed milk, do not rub, but constantly squeeze it softly. When it seems clean take it out and put it in a little clean skimmed milk; give it another squeeze, and lay it out on sheets of stout paper; touch every here and there with the fingers to draw out the scallions and edges; lay sheets of paper over the lace, and a heavy weight over all till dry. If laid on anything soft the moisture is absorbed, and the lace will not be nearly so new looking.

ESQ.—Dark circles under the eyes, which are attributable to various causes, among them irregular hours of sleep, may be made less apparent, if not entirely removed, by laying the face, as often as convenient, with warm water. Early rising, exercise in the open air, and the avoidance of habitual dissipation will render the recurrence of these circles less frequent. When caused by worry, anxiety, grief, trouble, or any other mental emotion, we know of nothing that will make them disappear save the cause itself.

F. M.—Wash it off with strong soda and hot water, then scour it with the finest silver sand if your difficulty is that the wax exists in the varnish. After this another strong soda and hot water scrubbing, to be followed with plenty of clean hot water to get rid of the soda. When perfectly dry, lay on one coat of varnish and stain combined, which can be bought at any of the large general stores. When the first coat has been dry for one day lay on a second coat. This is the cheapest and simplest mode of proceeding.

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